

Illuminating Art:  
A Philosophical Perspective on Students' and Teachers' Work in Art Education

Guillermo Jorge Marini

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## ABSTRACT

### Illuminating Art: A Philosophical Perspective on Students' and Teachers' Work in Art Education

Guillermo Jorge Marini

This dissertation inquires about the situation of the arts in education by suggesting an alternative perspective on the way we see art. It does so through the illumination of three distinct yet complementary ways. First, this study explores what a *primordial sense of art* would look like. I argue that we can understand art as a knowing-making disposition where wondering with the artwork and relating with its inherent elements becomes one and the same activity. Second, this investigation proposes the notion of *respiration* as a lens that allows seeing art as a fact that assumes and surpasses similar and contrary interpretations of the artwork's meanings. Finally, this research proposes the notion of *exercise in possibility* as a way to further expand what art can look like in education. I claim that by developing resemblances of human life, art can operate as a standard of possibility. After characterizing each of these notions, I move on to refine their practical implications for students' and teachers' tasks.

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IN MEMORIAM



## Chapter One. Introduction.

By age nineteen I already had the growing intuition that I would dedicated my life to exploring the relationship between philosophy, art and education. That was the feeling with which I undertook my first teaching position. I was a sophomore in Philosophy, and I got the chance to teach two courses in a high school in the vicinity of Buenos Aires: philosophy and music. The philosophy side of the job had to do with teaching the first year of the Argentinean two-year philosophy curriculum. As it was a typical history-based course, the syllabus that the school provided me had only three names on it: Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. Questions? Follow the standards and teaching guidelines of the Social Sciences Curriculum. With all the caveats that these instructions could generate in the students and myself, this was nothing compared to the art section of my job.

The difficulty was that music was an elective class that the school wanted to offer to stress its general knowledge profile but it lacked any guideline, any. So, with a class of fifteen students, in a room with no instruments, and ninety minutes to meet every week, I thought, let's play music. However, a couple of classes spent singing folk songs with my students caused some curiosity in the staff and got the more experienced teachers asking questions like: What are you doing? What would be the criteria to evaluate your course? What are students learning? My instinctive reply to all questions was "music". But as I said that I realized that I was not answering what my fellow teachers were asking.

My colleagues' questions aimed at fundamental issues in art education: the epistemic point of view from where we approach the teaching and learning process; the type of standards and rubrics we use to assess the class as a whole and our students' work

in particular; the basic contents that we want to teach and make sure our students learn. Without doubt, all genuine educational concerns.

When the time came for me to confront this experience with mainstream research, the result was nothing but a confirmation of the seriousness of those questions. For instance, in the latest Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education (2004), Elliot Eisner and Michael Day characterize this field within the frames of Historical currents, Policy perspectives impacting the research of art, Learning in the visual arts, Teaching and teacher education, Forms of assessment in art education. Each one of these coordinates serves to portray the complex trends that have been ruling the development of the arts in education for the past thirty years or so.

Without disputing the worth of the answers that, for example, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum could provide I began to feel that there was a more original inquiry to develop. By ‘original,’ I mean an anterior stance from where to approach art education; not chronologically before but somehow through and beyond what we have come to call “art education.” In the most basic terms that I could think of my question was:

What is the art we talk about when we talk about the arts in education?

Truly enough, we do talk about many things relating to art education. For example, we do worry and invest a lot of resources in tracing the possible connections between the arts and academic performance (Winner & Cooper, 2000). Imagine the potential behind verifiable instruments that could tell us what is the art form that has the strongest impact on our children’ SAT! Equally, we have the sense that the arts have a tight connection with widely appreciated labor competencies such as creativity and innovation (Doddington, 2010). Knowing how to make better and cheaper products would probably expand the

economy and general welfare. And obviously, we seem to believe that the arts have the capacity to render some of the upmost instances of existential splendor (Koopman, 2005). No one would deliberately choose to get rid of the sources of such vital joys.

The truth is that these arguments –that in my reading emerge as three of the key perspectives from where to affirm the place of the arts in education– emphasize distinct qualities of the arts that live in the crossroads in which students and teachers work every day. This is to say, that in the actual practice of education we attend to a more complex order, an order build up by the interactions of teachers and students, relationships that are far richer than what any argument can explain. Because both teachers and students have to make their day and pass their exams; they make an effort for their present and future jobs; they need their joys as much as they need to assume their pains; they try to express themselves and inquiry on their own activity as something peculiarly humane. It is with these considerations in mind that I want to embrace my original question once again: What is the art that we talk about when we talk about the arts in education?

### A three-way road map

This project will propose three distinct yet complementary ways to illuminate art through the work that students and teachers undertake daily, as if they were lenses that could help us see qualities that seem difficult to perceive in the current situation of art education.

In Chapter Two, we will develop A primordial sense of art to help us begin approaching this inquiry. In the first place, I will try to introduce the conundrum that I find in the question about what is art education. In brief terms, the way we understand art education today is framed by what we can show about the relationship between art and

education, typically, what we could call the educational benefits of the arts. This is to say; when we look at art education we look according to those qualities that have been identified and made visible as positive outcomes.

But what about the possibility of other educational qualities that could be invisible when faced by the lights and vision instruments we have been using so far? If they exist we must seek for them in the ‘dark.’ But how do you seek for something in the dark where there is no light to illuminate it? Far from trying to propose a paradox, I am explicitly claiming that the perspectives we assume to approach art necessarily condition the art we are able to see. Thus, from the very outset of this project, I will be trying to gain awareness of the way we frame the arts for these frames –any frames indeed– serve the double objective of telling what we should expect to learn and what we should expect not to learn.

In this line of thought, I will argue that art supposes an original disposition, “primordial” in the language of Martin Heidegger (Malpas, 2006), that allows to rise beyond the heuristic distinction of ‘known skill’ and ‘made product.’ From a primordial viewpoint, I will consider art as a disposition in the sense that it sets in order the processes of knowing and making, and it helps sustain their collaboration. Here, knowing will expand its meaning into wondering within and about the artwork, and making will develop into unifying all of the artwork’s inherent elements.

In Chapter Three, we will work on Art as Respiration. We will first revisit the assumptions behind what is commonly understood to be educational in the arts by examining two intriguing arguments in favor of their intrinsic value. I will first consider Constantijn Koopman’s “art as fulfillment” (2005) and Claudia Ruitenberg’s “art-that-is-

other” (2002). I consider these authors as straightforward defenders of the arts as educational *per se* rather than as an addition *to* or a detour *from* education.

However, the way they present their arguments seems problematic for they *react against* mainstream art education. This presents no complication from an argumentative point of view, for they artfully pick their adversaries to better portray “art as fulfillment” and “art-that-is-other”. What I find challenging is that in doing so, their actual contributions become barely relatable, if not completely isolated from each other in real educational practice.

This is why I will propose Igor Stravinsky’s “respiration” (1975) as a surpassing alternative that engulfs the previous ones in the sense that through “respiration” we can approach Koopman’s and Ruitenbergh’s notions as interpretative terms, co-existent even when we may favor either one in approaching art. As an example of this engulfing, I will offer Maurice Ravel’s Bolero as an art work that helps distill three pedagogical implications contained in this approach to art: the consideration of art’s time in education; of its room; and of its overall sense of experiment.

In Chapter Four I will inquiry about art as an exercise in possibility. Here, I will explore the notions of *poiesis*, *mimesis* and possibility as conditions to learn with art from the viewpoint of Aristotle’s Poetics.

In considering *poiesis*, I will argue that the type of relationship between artist and work supposes both a mutually creative task and a relational process between all of the works’ basic elements (Heidegger, 1996). Through *mimesis*, I will argue that the type of learning that may be developed with art is not just a product of human interaction with the world but specifically depends on developing resemblances between human beings and

their works (Benjamin, 1996), and identifying those resemblances as such. The way of possibility will allow me to emphasize how the artwork may operate both as a crystallization of possibilities and as a standard for the future discovery of new resemblances.

In Chapter Five, Illuminating the work of students' and teachers' in art education, we will use these three ways to try to make sense of two lived art in education experiences. We will provide special attention to the way both examples help recuperate the conclusions at which we arrived in each Chapter, and present them under the light of students' and teachers' everyday work.

#### What these three ways are

By now the reader could be asking herself: What are these “primordial”, “respiration” and “possibility” notions? Where did they come from? What is their use? It is clear to me that they are interpretative ways like the ones we will discuss in Chapter Three. I would be happy to call them heuristics if the reader keeps in mind that the Greek *eurisko* literally means “the action of discovering” (Liddell, 1996). These three ways are nothing but that, actions of dis-covering art in education. They are not the final product of this discovery nor some form of rubric to assess the nature of this action. They are three possible ways of coming to know this very process. In other words, they are paths to help us “see watching”<sup>1</sup> the ways according which we could see the arts in education under a new light.

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Edgar Morin (2004) has taken this notion into an adjacent arena by defining philosophical epistemology in this way.

With this in mind, I do not expect the reader to learn by heart the set of arguments and examples that build up each of these ways. Instead, I hope to be able to provide the necessary context for the reader to immerse herself within these ways and appropriate the peculiar crossroads that I find in between philosophy, art and education. Put differently, more than guiding the reader through a series of qualities that could build some form of conceptual definition; I prefer to call into question some of the prevalent conditions that seem to obviously frame the relationship between philosophy, art and education today.

Along these lines, it will be helpful to highlight that I present each of these three ways following a similar strategy: I will begin each Chapter building on arguments and examples that help us identify and distinguish some of the salient qualities present in each way –Knowing and making within a primordial sense of art, similar and contrast within respiration, *poiesis* and *mimesis* within possibility–. I will conclude each chapter trying to present other arguments and examples to bring together those same qualities without mixing them up. Building on Tyson Lewis’ (2011) notion of rhythm, I want to say that this movement to distinguish and to bring back together will be both a cycle within cycles as well as an actual growth. This is to say that the grounds from where we will begin telling the different qualities that build up each of these three ways will not be the same grounds where we will find ourselves when reuniting them, and yet we will be discussing the same three ways.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is why I argue that these ways are distinct yet complementary, for they imply each other, and what one emphasizes is another way of presenting what the other developed in turn. Put differently, the reader should expect a recursive thesis more than a progressive one which is to say that my last argument about possibility will not only serve as a conclusion to a primordial sense of art but also as its renewed introduction.

### A note on my examples

I will use seven ‘art works’ examples: Emperor by Beethoven; Paintings from Lascaux Cave; Guernica by Pablo Picasso; Bolero by Maurice Ravel; The Gates by Christo and Jeanne-Claude; Gertrude Stein by Pablo Picasso; One by Jackson Pollock.

I anticipate that the reader can be struck by the fact that I am only offering Western art, most of which has already entered into the Elysium of the ‘classics.’ Also, these are popular artworks in the sense that thousands of people have free access to these works during certain days of the week in major museums, or theaters, or through the internet. With out doubts, the selection of these works is a demonstration of my Western education, personal tastes, and idiosyncratic point of views about what constitutes artful examples, and publicly accessible works.

My honest expectation in providing these works as examples is that they will help me clarify and advance my argument. I do believe that they may exemplarily show the qualities that I find in them, and that they will serve as appropriate capstones from where to develop my investigation.



## Chapter 2. A primordial sense of art

Let us imagine that a man loses his keys one night and starts looking for them under the light of a street lamp. When people join him and try to help him search, they ask where it was that he thinks he might have let them fall; with a frustrated look on his face, he then points into the dark distance and says, by way of explanation, “I am looking under the lamppost because this is where the light is!” This story, introduced by Janice Ross (2007), Professor of Dance at Stanford University, provides us with a metaphorical description of the current situation in arts education advocacy. Certainly we can only look for the arts in education where there is something about them that can be seen. And yet, there may be aspects of them concealed beyond the reach of the vision instruments we have been using thus far.

This chapter will affirm the possibility of approaching art in a way that assists in revealing these “invisible” qualities. We will begin by portraying the type of lights that mainstream art education is framed by. Second, we will show how the reduction of the arts into transferable skills can be both illuminated and surpassed by an inquiry into the practice of art. Then we will characterize some of the distinct attributes of practicing science and making art as a means to further distill what a primordial sense of art may be actually modeled after. Finally, I will propose to recuperate a primordial sense of art, a perspective framed by a making-knowing disposition.

What can we begin to suggest about a way of seeing something that, as described in the example above, remains in the shadows? No doubt, this is an “obscure” way of seeing. But a thing can be obscure in two ways. On the one hand, it can lack the capacity to reveal

what it is, to “show its colors,” and thus we judge it as nonsense, arcane, or uncertain—as expressed in the Latin etymology of *obscurus* (Lewis, 2002). On the other hand, while resisting the usual forms of comprehension, it may still invite us to linger with it, this implicit invitation being the first sign that its obscurity may correspond to an intensity of meaning that we are not used to perceiving. This is the sense in which Aristotle (1957) says in Metaphysics:

The eyes of owls are to the radiance of daylight like our mind is to reality (993b 9-11).<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of this image lies in the fact that there is more to be seen than what meets the eye, or, in other words, in our usual ways of seeing. This is not to say that our cognitive powers are defective in any way but rather to acknowledge that there are aspects of reality that will not simply adapt to us and thus will challenge us to leave the eyes of our mind ajar. It is precisely due to those “objects” that are invisible that the owl will develop an enhanced vision as the night falls. Put differently, not being able to look at the Sun directly is an opportunity to learn how to see in the shadows.

In this line, one of the most obscure aspects we are forced to deal with in the arts is the fact that “we appeal to [them] to say, paradoxically, what words can never say” (Eisner, 2002). Consider how we all seem to share a plethora of experiences in which we turn to the arts for an expression of what impacts us most deeply: The bonding of two lovers, the entrance into the different stages of life, the eulogy given over a casket, even the celebration of everyday joys. Think of those artworks we most cherish and keep throughout our lives as an expression of who we are: that portrait, an amulet, this tune. In and of

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<sup>3</sup> Beginning with this, all translations into English are my responsibility.

themselves, these artworks have meanings that evade explicit explanations and yet they seem to offer an alternative view of the spectrum of human life that would remain otherwise hidden. Consider how our life would look without them!

However, almost every debate about the role of the arts in education seems to be framed by the preeminent variables of policy, budget, and accountability. It is in this environment that we listen to questions such as: What is the purpose of the arts in education? What do they teach? What problems do they solve? How can they be assessed? How much will they cost? While there appears to be an implicit consensus that the arts have an educational role or that they at least embody aspects of a liberal arts education, what is pervasive throughout the contemporary debate seems to be the question of what a credible justification would look like. Perhaps in pursuing the quest for intrinsic justifications, we may be better able to understand how the obscurity surrounding the arts may actually shed some light on education today.

Before continuing, it is worth clarifying what I mean by an “intrinsic justification.” If a justification aims at “showing [something or someone] to be right or reasonable” (Agnes, 2002), I understand an intrinsic justification to do so by exhibiting the value of core qualities rather than outcomes that can be verified against external criteria. In other words, an intrinsic justification would reflect the qualities that live in the practice and inquiry of art rather than expose only the evaluation of how the arts impact other areas of life. The following two sections will help to spell out this point.

### The shrinking of the arts into transferable skills

As vastly documented across different literature reviews (Eisner, 2009; Koopman, 2005; Winner & Cooper, 2000), the majority of fieldwork research and philosophical inquiry devoted to justifying the presence of the arts in education have done so in terms of the arts' instrumental contributions to non-artist results: Fundamentally, the arts' hypothetical potential to trigger cognition within the school setting and their supposed ability to incite a democratic sensibility in society at large. From a cognitive point of view, this means that visual arts could have the potential to improve reading proficiency, music to enhance the understanding of mathematics, drama to increase verbal skills, and all the arts to augment emotional intelligence. Likewise, the arts are considered agents of democratic socialization, for they seem to teach students how to creatively address society's challenges, stimulating various forms of collaborative work while respecting people's differences (Barchana, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

However, as Stuart Richmond (1998), Art Education Professor at Simon Fraser University, indicates, although these perspectives do not lack internal logic once accepted, it is important to realize that they ultimately depend on the emphasis being on transferable artistic skills which supposedly benefit other school subjects rather than the practice and inquiry of art *per se*. These instrumentalist views do promise to teach some skill through the use of the arts, and they succeed even at the cost of distorting art in the process. An archetypical example will help clarify the point:

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<sup>4</sup>As a combination of both sets of benefits, there has lately been a renewed effort to frame "creativity" and "innovation" as qualities that emerge from the arts and may expand into the whole of the work force (Doddington, 2010).

During the 2011 edition of the Philosophy of Education Society Conference, Yueh-Mei Li from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, presented a paper titled “School Funding and Arts Education.” Presenting her position as a straightforward advocate for the arts, she proceeded to defend both the budget for and the actual presence of the arts in the school curricula. Her core argument was as follows, “It has been demonstrated that children that learn music score higher in their mathematics SATs” (Li, 2011). Thus, she provided conclusive evidence that the arts had a positive impact on students’ mathematical performances, which she put forth as the strongest reason to defend the general inclusion of the arts into the classroom.

It seems to me that this line of thought actually works against the otherwise legitimate attempt to defend the educational value of the arts. The reason is twofold: First of all, the logic behind these arguments seems to be fallacious. I use “fallacious” here not in the sense that I believe Ms. Li is lying, but rather that she is arranging her argument in a way that very much follows the pattern of an “after this therefore because of this”<sup>5</sup> fallacy that would suggest something like:

Fact A:	“A group of students scored high in their math SATs.”
Fact B:	“The same students took a music course <i>before</i> sitting for their SATs.”
Conclusion:	“A group of students scored high in their math SATs <i>because</i> they took a music course.”

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<sup>5</sup> The so-called “Post hoc ergo propter hoc” fallacy.

As observed, the fallacy lies on the *before-because* relationship. The fact that a group of students that scored high on their exam had previously taken a music course is no sufficient reason to demonstrate that the music course improved in any way the exam result. Although this formal observation may appear to be commonplace, there is a long list of educational researches that, while cautiously *co-relating* the arts with cognitive and social outcomes, virtually frames these domains as *causally* related.<sup>6</sup>

The propensity to look for causal relationships is significant here, for I believe it predetermines the type of artistic outcomes we are willing to legitimize as educational. As Winner and Cooper (2000) declare in one of the most extensive investigations on this issue: there is “no evidence (yet) for a casual link between art study and academic achievement.” Ultimately, it looks as if the main argument for the arts in education is to seek for a proof that they contain some sorts of capabilities that can be put to use for a more traditional and practical subject.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in a report sponsored by the United States President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, James Catterall (1999), Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles, concludes that “*students who report consistent high levels of involvement in instrumental music over the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency by grade 12*” (p.2). In the same report, Dennie Palmer Wolf, Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, highlights that “*in the context of continuing a well-implemented opera work, groups of students become increasingly expert at active participation in the form of taking turns and asking questions. Student remarks link back to earlier turns, they can make constructive comments, and they can edit their own earlier suggestions in the light of an evolving discussion*” (p. 94). My emphases.

<sup>7</sup> Along these lines, Elliot Eisner (2004), Emeritus Professor of Art and Education at the Stanford University School of Education, has already provided a set of longitudinal studies that track non-art teachers’ contradictory use of art in the classroom. The research illustrates how instructors are very much aware of the disciplinary outcomes that are

is the preliminary caveat that we need to bear in mind when reading that the above relation between music and mathematics “has been demonstrated.”

### Expanding the arts to be more than skills training

Let us next focus on what “learning music” might be taken to mean in Li’s argument. There is no real discussion about the fact that Western musical notation has historically relied on fractions, for example, as a means of expressing some of the inherent relationships between rhythm and melody. This is why we talk about the whole note (1) as the reference value in any given measure, and it is precisely in relation to that whole note that we play halves ( $1/2$ ), quarters ( $1/4$ ), eighths ( $1/8$ ), sixteenths ( $1/16$ ), thirty-seconds ( $1/32$ ), and sixty-fourths ( $1/64$ ). Likewise, the relationship between pitches has been noted in fractions since the pre-Socratics started researching the basic sounds that can be produced out of a single string by changing its length. Tradition has it that when Pythagoras first divided a string in one-half, he wrote down this sound as one octave higher, or  $2/1$ , compared to the sound produced by the whole string (Kirk, 2003). One could fairly well conclude, then, that mathematical fractions constitute one of the tools every musician in the Western world acquires, implicitly or explicitly, while learning music.

The question still remains, however, as to whether there is *anything else* in learning music beyond gaining the ability to deal with fraction-like relationships. Let us consider the musical dynamic terms for a moment. Words like *adagio*, *diminuendo*, *forte* constitute more than an indication of the speed and intensity of sound or the stylistic way to carry the

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expected from their choosing to invest their students’ time with the arts. The guiding principle seems to be: “Use the arts! (as long as this exercise can produce visible results)”

music throughout the performance. In learning to play music, these terms invite both teachers and students to make a decision about *how* to play a given phrase. In other words, the actual rendition of their musical act becomes an interpretative exercise of the dynamic terms indicated in the musical score.

Let us imagine a music class where teacher and students are rehearsing the second part of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, the *adagio* movement. I am going to assume that the conductor, musicians and occasional spectators know the music by heart; it is a widely recognized "classic." It is very likely that all involved have heard a number of performances of the same movement, so they have a large set of common elements with which to compare and complement their rehearsal. They even know that *adagio* means "at ease" in Italian, and as a technical musical term, it means that the piece should have roughly sixty to seventy rhythmical beats per minute, just like the human heart at rest.

Now we arrive at the moment of actually playing music during the rehearsal. The musicians tune their instruments, the conductor stares at them, he breathes, the room fills with silent anticipation, and then the baton comes down, firing the first beat. Gently, each instrument blends in, preparing the stage for the piano just as a farmer plows the soil, preparing the seedbed.

However, as the piano enters the scene, there is a disruption, uneasiness—something does not seem to work. So the conductor stops the rehearsal and opens a brief dialogue with the pianist. They both know well enough what *adagio* means: there is no need for the metronome to count beats or the dictionary to explain words. What is at stake here is not a matter of technical knowledge, but of genuine musical inquiry.



In our example, conductor, pianist, and orchestra members inquire about the “intention of the phrase,” “the appropriate emphasis with which to approach it,” “its texture.” Then, they direct their attention to the written music and the orchestral measure that anticipates the piano, and wonder about the “space” that the chords are granting the piano: “How will we play this?” After a short exchange, the pianist promptly rehearses a couple of starts on the keyboard, nods to the conductor, and waits for him to summon the whole group once again. This time, the piano gracefully joins in and Beethoven’s *adagio* continues to be rehearsed once again.

What happens, then, is a demonstration of what Suzanne Langer (1942) calls “studio metaphors.” Artists in general, musicians in this case, are conscious of knowing certain qualities of their art that they are nonetheless unable to put down in words. Obviously, they know the necessary technical expressions that rule their art; they have grown and become artists with them, but, still, they daily find themselves in situations where that knowledge is not sufficient to sustain their art’s expressiveness. Thus, for a lack of adequate terms, they tend to create metaphors that account for this tacit knowledge, an exercise that enriches their overall practice and helps it to evolve.<sup>8</sup>

The conductor, pianist, and orchestra musicians can now account for an educational opportunity that was virtually present in the score but needed an exercised inquiry of its music to become alive. One could argue that the participants have acquired a wider sense of appreciation for the multiple musical features that are intertwined in this piece; they have demonstrated the ability to speak to and about tacitly known aspects of their art; they have

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<sup>8</sup> Certainly, Michael Polanyi (2009) has taken this idea of tacit knowing into a new level by stressing its relevance for scientific inquiry.

dealt with the challenge of offering an alternative meaningful interpretation of an already-known piece; ultimately, they made music while also playing Beethoven.

Not to over romanticize art, it is worth noting with Nicholas Burbules (2008), Professor of Education at the University of Illinois, that “simply because the knowledge at stake may be inexpressible [in the sense of not being explicit all the time], the strategies for fostering it are not random or happenstance” (p. 673). The example above is perhaps an everyday situation in rehearsal practice, but it does not come into existence out of the void. Consider how the musicians know at least the fundamental elements of their art that enable them to hold their instruments and read the score. Without this pre-existent knowledge, they would not be able to move into what remains to be played in Beethoven. Put differently, some of the crucial features in playing music depend on a previous and ongoing commitment to art as a condition to be able to make music beyond the written rhythms and pitches.

Going back to Li’s example (2011), I want to further argue that, although we use fractions to express some aspects of the language of Western music, this does not reduce the reality of music to its mathematical qualities only. An idea we will further develop in the discussion of *tekne* in Chapter Four, in music, as in every art, tools are necessary for the building of the work but they do not constitute the work of art *per se*. The tool is always organic to the development of the craft, and it naturally serves it by aiding in the material concretion of the work. In this sense, a tool is always instrumental, as fractions are to music, because it may be isolated from the whole of the work and serve some other purpose—like empowering mathematical awareness—without rendering the original

artwork meaningless. In other words, one could argue that the tool is necessary in the making of the work but not sufficient to make sense of it.

I would also argue that an overemphasis on the instrumental, transferable skills of the arts tends to reduce them into mere servants of other school subjects instead of opening up an inquiry on the qualities they themselves specifically have to offer to education. If the strongest possible justification for the arts in education lies in their being some type of matrix for abilities that actually belong to another subject but are more easily acquired through art, how do we know if other activities, like stargazing or ping-pong, will not prove more effective teachers in the future and thus downgrade the arts even further? As Constantijn Koopman (2005), Professor at the Dutch Royal Conservatoire, states:

As long as we rely only on instrumental values [...] our justification remains vulnerable; for it can always be questioned whether the benefits are really significant and durable, and whether the arts are the most efficient way of bringing about the results (p. 96).<sup>9</sup>

By now we have already examined how both looking for causality between the arts and academic performance, and searching for transferrable skill seems to render an instrumental version of the arts where there will be little or no room to appreciate the value of music's dynamic terms interpretation, for example. As a matter of fact, if we search for strong relationships between the arts and achievement we may eventually find some co-

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<sup>9</sup> I am reminded here of a quotation from Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (2007). It goes in the line of the following thought experiment: If we could achieve the same results that art does by way of an injection, would we prefer the injection to art? This argument complements Koopman's, for if the emphasis is placed on what the arts generate as effects, then their value remains conditioned to the evaluation of outcomes and nothing can assure us that they will not be replaced by something else in the near future. Although outside of the scope of our present investigation, it seems Wittgenstein could have wondered about these same issues when he declared "an aesthetic explanation is not a casual explanation" (p. 18).

relations in the same way that if we seek to identify the most productive musical skills to transfer into the school curriculum we may agree on some. Regardless of *what* or *if* we find something—we may be actually self-fulfilling our own prophecy—in following this path we seem to be teaching the mathematics in music rather than the music in playing Beethoven.

### Seeing the arts on the model of the sciences

Moving on, I see a deeper tension that runs through the relationship between art and education based on the contemporary understanding of what constitutes mainstream education in general. Following Catherine Elgin (2002), Professor of Philosophy of Education at Harvard University, we need to realize that the arts in education are framed today by a monolithic way of understanding education that subsumes most forms of knowledge under the model of the scientific disciplines. Thus, it seems that art education has to either adapt to the current scientific standards of how education should look or surrender the claim of being educational at all.

Not to fall into exaggerating, I want to emphasize that the sciences and arts are related and share common elements; after all they are both human inventions. And this relationship certainly seems to be a fact from the point of view of a human being from whom both scientific and artistic makings emerge as a continuation of her vital activity. However, when it comes to considering the education of this same person, the main artistic qualities allowed into the threshold of the “educational” seem to be those that can demonstrate progress, be quantified, systematized, analyzed and explained: the scientific in the artistic, so to speak. As Eisner (2004) declares, the arts seem to “seek legitimacy by

looking more like their academic peers” [...] “emulating criteria and standards that populate academic subjects” (p.6).

In this section, I wish to resist the caricature of the differences between arts and sciences: the arts are creative, whereas the sciences are composed of dispassionate formulas, etc. Instead, I will try to furnish a characterization of the distinct attributes involved in doing science and producing art as a means to expose the types of challenges and contributions that I believe art has to offer to education. For the sake of clarity, I will focus on Newton’s Law of Universal Gravitation and Picasso’s Guernica as archetypes of how making science and art look like.

Let us first compare the movement of Newton’s and Picasso’s activities. Science advances step-by-step, like a man going up a ladder whose journey physically depends on each of the previous steps that his field and he have taken in the past. Once he has moved on, there is no real need for revisiting what has happened already, since each new step leaves the previous ones behind either by correcting or expanding them into an ever-richer complexity. In this sense, science literally *pro-gresses* (Lewis, 2002), it “moves forth,” it “improves” as it gets further away from its primitive origins into the unveiling of what is still unknown.

Without doubt, Sir Isaac Newton acknowledged his past tradition, but he was set on future discoveries—what was yet to be found. He knew well enough that Kepler’s description of the orbits of the planets made sense but did not fully explain why they actually moved in ellipses. It was only after continuous investigations that he was able to find a new and—temporarily—definitive formula to fill in the gap in his contemporary’s

theory. And it was thanks to Newton's own inconsistencies that Einstein would later advance gravitational physics. And it was thanks to Einstein's gaps that... In general, it is the solution to challenges that truly moves science on.

Art seems to move in a different manner. More than following a centrifugal vector, art seems to revisit its themes, materials, and techniques in a way that resembles the flux and reflux of a tide. It is perhaps in this sense that Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that no matter the evolution of artistic instruments, visiting the prehistoric paintings of Lascaux (see below) still astounds us. As if within those underground chambers, these strangely familiar fingerprints and animal hunting scenes somehow contain the whole of art history (p. 296).



After visiting Lascaux for the first time, Pablo Picasso is reported to have said “They have invented everything” (Thurman, 2008). In the voice of one of the most progressive artists of his time, this statement on one of the most ancient of arts calls forth the fact that art does not have to progress incrementally in order to advance; it does not require the newness of a breakthrough to be seen as original. For example, Picasso’s Guernica (see above) surely consists of bulls and horses and men like those on the prehistoric walls, but Picasso does not seem to be correcting or expanding those paintings; it rather looks as if he was renewing a common theme from his own viewpoint.

Going back to the movement of science through the years, it seems to me that we not only get a sense of its inevitable evolution by comparing yesterday’s technical accomplishments (like the capacity to measure the fall of an apple from a tree) with today’s satellites orbiting around the Earth, but specifically in weighing the amount of data we presently have at our fingertips. These discrete pieces of information that reflect quantifiable phenomena constitute the most solid ground from which to take new steps into the further advancement of scientific knowledge (Elgin, 2002). What is more, this information is as accurate as can be produced by man, for it purposely leaves aside all nuanced particularities, favoring a standardization of individual qualities that is easy to subsume under general rules.

Consider Newton’s achievement in arriving at the definitive formula of the acceleration at which an object falls, the famous  $9,8 \text{ meter / second}^2$ , which signifies that every second the object increases its fall speed by 9,8 meters. What he did in order to get to this number was to record the acceleration of different objects falling from a tower. Some fell closer to  $10\text{m/s}^2$ , some closer to  $9\text{m/s}^2$ , the difference mainly being due to buoyancy

and air resistance. After a long succession of experiments, he was able to dissolve those subtle differences into a general formula. In other words, each of his tests gained meaning inasmuch as they approached the conclusive general rule.

Likewise, the tide-like movement characteristic of the arts is not only perceived by comparing Lascaux's prehistoric figures with Guernica but in alternating between taking a close-up and distant perspective of the work as a whole as well as of its elements. This movement allows for the possibility of realizing how the different elements of the work are actually composed, in such a way that every single detail makes a difference to the whole work. And it is precisely such unity that demands that no detail standardized omitted or blended but alternatively recognized and appreciated from the different perspectives from which the work is approached.

Consider Picasso's different studies on the figure of the horse for Guernica (see below)—what we may call sketches or trials. As we will continue to see while examining Maurice Ravel's Bolero in Chapter Three, this exercise of reformulating the same theme or figure has unique implications for the work of art as a whole. Consider how Picasso finally introduces the horse in its proper place within the larger canvas; its former qualities as a series of attempts are not discarded or neglected but rather united into the entire work in such a way that if they were missing Guernica would become a different work. In fact, it is superficial to speak about the horse as “an element” of Guernica. Who would dare to ask where the horse begins and Guernica ends?





Now let us consider the salient actions in producing scientific data: analyses and explanation. Science analyses in the very etymological sense of the Greek *analyen* (Liddell, 1996), it “breaks up,” it unloosens the different elements of life, scanning for those graspable qualities that help the scientist make sense of the subject matter under study. Similarly, science explains: literally, from the Latin *ex-plano* (Lewis, 2002), which means “to flatten,” for it aims at making all peculiarities plain by carefully selecting the most accurate and univocal language available (i.e., typically a mathematical translation of the data above).

This is perhaps *the* reason why Newton is regarded as one of the most important physicists of all time. He was able to analyze the way in which the mass of two objects affects both, how bodies fall toward each other, and why things move in the customary manner in which we daily experience them. What is more, he made sense of these phenomena and expressed his understanding in the most accurate and univocal terms possible:  $= 9,8\text{m/s}^2$ . This is a powerful formula, for it allows even the physics neophyte to begin to understand a complex phenomenon like gravity in such a way that he no longer *just* experiences it, but begins experimenting *with* it.

Art's inherent demand for a recognition and appreciation of its integrity calls for a different approach from that of analysis and scientific explanation; art needs instead metaphor and description. Art actively embodies metaphor because it allows us to consider both the meanings that move toward a resemblance of reality and those other meanings that move farther away from it, creating an opening to unveil new and intermediate meanings. Likewise, art supposes description, for it literally “de-scribes” and “un-writes” the labels we use to name things and presents us with a conceptually naked perspective on the makings or creations of mankind.

When asked about the meaning of Guernica, Picasso allegedly answered in the line of:

This bull is a bull and this horse is a horse... If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning [...] I make the painting for the painting.

Certainly, this did not mean a rejection of the historic circumstances under the influence of which the work was commissioned. Guernica was the explicit response to the government's request to say “something” about the 1937 German bombing of Spain. And yet, Guernica as a painting of men, bulls, and horses seems to call for a pondered rumination of the work even beyond a contextualized translation. The meaning of the meaning of the work seems to refer us inevitably back to the work itself. We will return to this point in Chapter Three, when discussing the notion of “art-that-is-other” (Ruitenberg, 2002).

We also know art and science depend on different ways of experimentation. The work of science takes shape in an experiment whose conditions and results ought to be as

precise and concrete as possible, clearly defining the boundary between what the scientist knows and what he hypothesizes. It is an experiment brought forth by the identification of an original problem, whose solution is conjectured and tested, and remains a problem until it is finally solved. In this setting, ambiguities are antiscientific, for they interfere with the clear visualization of the problem, its thorough experimentation, and systematic generalization.

The work of art is an experiment of another kind, for it opens up such a degree of possibility that its necessary material constraints are oftentimes supplemented or completed by whoever is observing the work. It is perhaps in this sense that Igor Stravinsky (1975) talks about the viewer's capacity to resolve the chord that remains dissonant or complete the line that has not been drawn. In engaging with art, it seems we tend to perceive the unclear and assume or complete its meaning in an effort to make sense of the whole work. This creative act provides a feeling of fresh possibilities without quite defining the work. In this sense, ambiguities are an inherent element of art, for they seem to encompass and even amplify the layers of possible meanings in the work.

Finally, we could argue that, although science and art are human creations, the way in which they relate man and work are rather different. The scientific method poses characteristic demands on the scientist, for it is a disciplinary given that the technical conditions of his experiments and the ultimate expression of his findings must be detached from his individual circumstances. This does not mean that the scientist should not feel his quest as a personal obsession; on the contrary, without this passion he would never commit to pursuing his scientific experiments. What is decisive here is that those passions should never contaminate the environment of his experiments and the logic of his procedures. To

paraphrase David Hansen, Professor of Philosophy and Education at Teachers College, the scientist puts the world in question, but not himself.

In reading Newton's notes on gravitation, it is easy to find how his disciplinary scheme ends up reinforcing the distinction between subject and object and seeing them as real and independent entities. What Newton was looking for was a definitive solution to the problem of gravitation. The only good scientific answer had to be a proposition of timeless truth, a universal law independent of all human circumstances. His efforts were directed toward the discovery of a principle that rules the Universe from the very origins of all beings and yet rests completely detached from them. And he did succeed: gravitation is a fact explained by Newton's law.

Art challenges the artist completely. Its processes and products cannot but be embedded, soaked in his person. Far from reducing the idea of art to a whimsical outpouring of self-expression, art should instead be seen as encompassing the qualities of its maker like a seal of which only the edges are visible. It is perhaps in this sense that Jorge Luis Borges used to say that "every poem is autobiographical," as opposed to autobiography, because the artist seems to be the first reference in a work of his own making that both includes and questions him and still resonates beyond his reach and comprehension.

Guernica is Picasso's work. But can it be an independent object in the style of Newton's law? We have to acknowledge that it includes the combination of pre-existing materials into a piece of craftsmanship, and under certain conditions it may be called "a thing." But while I can apply only the gravitational formula when following Newton's

rules, in engaging with Guernica, I need to add an active collaboration on my side. This is to say that my relationship with the work of art is not one of reproduction or utilization but of personal participation. There are aspects of my bond with Guernica that I cannot translate into universal objective concepts that people would understand univocally. The artwork may be done as “a thing,” but its meaning, its intimate taste, cannot be alluded to without giving way to interpretative metaphors.

### The unfolding of a primordial sense of art

Far from trying to portray the sciences as cold laboratory work and the arts as humanizing enjoyment, I hope instead that the comparison above has been able to draw attention to the problematic situation that the arts in education faces. For, if education is framed today within scientific parameters, then art’s intrinsic qualities seem to be condemned to be viewed as second-class versions of bad science and definitively poor contributions to mainstream education.

Alternatively, it could be tempting to suggest here that the arts are a somewhat necessary complement to the sciences, almost as if the arts produced the opposite picture of reality from the sciences, thus creating a balance between them and thereby enhancing the educational benefits of both. I believe that David Graves (2002), Professor of Philosophy and Art at Tel Aviv College, explains this complete effect of art in the following passage:

Art may be an endlessly variable attempt to gain a unique perspective on the mismatch [between interacting object and subject] by creating artifacts that embody just that sort of dialectic [...] Art investigates and hones the ability to figure out if, when, how, and why the analytical and the intuitive, the objective and subjective, the distinct and the confused, the said and the felt, all mesh together into an appropriate meaning (p. 13).

If I am reading Graves correctly, in the best case scenario, the arts may actually connect the analytical with the intuitive, the objective with the subjective, the said with the felt, and eventually suggest a more complete and accurate meaning. This proposal certainly sounds appealing. But when I think of parents, teachers, and policymakers, I cannot help but hear the lingering questions: Will you be able to provide for an educational discipline of the intuitive and subjective? What does this completion and fulfillment of meaning have to offer to students' education?

Along this same line of thought, I think that Grave's explanation of the arts helps identify another risk that goes even beyond instrumentalization: that is, the metamorphosis of the arts into a discipline. This is a subtle peril, perhaps based on some forms of aestheticism. From this point of view, the arts would become the domain of the intuitive, the sensitive, and the subjective: its own distinct discipline called "the arts." The key problem is that restricting the arts to only these categories—that is, in the event we were indeed able to isolate them—would eventually reinforce their fracture with the sciences and other ways of dealing with human activity. What is more, if the arts become the discipline of the intuitive *et alia*, then we revert to the conundrum of how to teach them as school courses while respecting their core values, for what would a standard of the subjective and intuitive look like?

In the current situation, I believe we need to try to recuperate a primordial sense of art. What this means, first of all, is to attempt the employment of both an imaginative and philosophical exercise which will express the meaning of art before

the rupture between “science-based education” and the arts conceived of simply as a set of differing skills and/or disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Plain and simple, I want to propose that art embodies the original unity between making and knowing expressed in the production of a work. In other words, the acknowledgement that art is at the base not only of some ways of cognition and production but at the heart of the human capacity of knowing and making. This is not a claim of chronological importance but rather the suggestion that, from a philosophical standpoint, art supposes a knowing-making disposition rather than the split consideration of either the production of things or knowledge.

In calling art “a knowing-making disposition,” I am considering “disposition” in the etymological sense of *dis-pono*; that is, “setting in order” (Lewis, 2002). From this point of view, I believe there is an intimate relationship between what we may call “the capacity to know” and “the capacity to make,”—a mutual and intertwined “setting in order” that becomes manifest in art. Consider how in coming to produce any sort of work we often find ourselves deepening our knowledge of this very process and work. Conversely, we likewise find ourselves actually building mental or physical images of what it is that we are coming to know.

We need to acknowledge, though, that nothing can insure that this ordering will come close to realization. It may indefinitely remain in a latent condition,

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<sup>10</sup> By proposing this attempt, I am not denying that the sciences have actually become the privileged way of conceiving of education. But I believe that we, especially teachers, need to realize that the journey through each individual disciplinary study can only take us so far into contact with reality. Hopefully, recuperating such a primordial perspective of art will allow us to surpass this division.

obscured by automatic reproductions of works or absentminded labeling of understandings. Still, we can reasonably expect that the realization of this vision of the arts will be well worth the effort. For, at the end of the day, what is at stake here is not only the place or role of “the arts” in “science-based education” but arts’ inherent relationship with human beings as art-capable and art-in-need beings: in other words, art as evidence of the cohesion of human capacities.

Let us consider, for example, the crafts of those prehistoric cave dwellers that Picasso judged as having invented everything. What is it that these people found inside the Earth some 40,000 years ago? Did they discover the disciplines of the fine arts or the sciences somewhere in the dark? No, they had no light to see those things. They seem to have lacked the “maturity” to distinguish art from science. The truth is that disciplinary distinctions were irrelevant back then (in fact, they did not exist at all!).

Let us imagine how their living conditions felt like. They were immersed in the gelid environment of the Earth’s last glacial period. Resources were abundant although they came with a cost. Sometimes the errand spark turned into wild fire, sometimes the hunting expedition, catastrophe. The fight for the very basics of life consumed most of the work of their minds and bodies.

Still, they lived a human life, and they showed so. We cannot tell where it came from or how it started; maybe from the blood of the same prey that the clan ate together or from the crushed fruit of the wild bush; perhaps made of ashes or liquid mineral. What is certain is that one day a cave-dweller soaked her hands in



pigment and stamped her print on the wall, creating one of the first signs of humanity ever.

The one quality of this activity that is decisive for us –and was obvious for our ancestors– is that in painting Lascaux’s caves they were deprived of the ability to abstract that differentiates between the elements of making and the process of making *per se*. Skills, technique, and materials meant nothing beyond the exercise of stamping handprints on the wall. Positively stated, they used reality to make their art, not heuristics.

What we can see today on these cave walls are the painted drawings of bulls, deer, horses, and people emerging from the floor and apparently engulfing everything from the high dome. It feels impossible to be in the cave, watch these figures from a distance and assume a detached perspective. They seem to be everywhere at once, all around me; more precisely, they seem to be with me as I am watching. A primordial sense of art supposes, then, an activity in the process of being developed by human beings, using their own materials and tools: a process that unifies all elements in the same activity. We will further expand this point when discussing the qualities of *poiesis* in Chapter Four.

A primordial sense of art also supposes a peculiar form of knowing that is, I believe, beyond the distinction between intuitive and discursive. It may be the case that Lascaux’s artists first intuited and then reflected or vice versa—or even interchangeably. This is not important for us now, for the painted walls seem to

indicate that knowing meant something closer to wondering than aiming at an explanation. Along these lines, let us bear in mind two aspects of wonder:

On the one hand, how wonder moves us back to that point in the relationship with our own works where we and all those attending the work are newly amazed by its fresh meaning. On the other hand, how wonder, having placed us in that original venue, incites us to circulate around the work, as the cave artist has done in her multilayered renditions of animals and people, and as the viewer cannot help to do while walking in the underground chambers.

Put differently, approaching knowing as wonder means revisiting the same work every time as if it was the first time. It supposes the possibility of seeing how an alternative way of meaning emerges before us, one that becomes opaque when we try to conceal it in definitive terms but seems to reveal in its fullest when we retreat, giving way to its peculiar splendor. We will continue developing these two points in Chapter Three when discussing the idea of *respiration*.

Recently, Jeff Malpas (2006), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania, has reminded how Heidegger brilliantly insinuates this double dimension of wonder:

Wonder displaces man into and before beings as such... Wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking, because, before all else, it displaces man into that essence whereby he then finds himself caught up in the midst of beings as such and as a whole [,] and finds himself caught up in them (p. 295).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Malpas (2006) himself seems to paraphrase this argument: “In wonder, we encounter things in a way that is prior to encounter as any sort of *relating* to things; the encounter that wonder brings into view is just our being already *with* things, already given over to them and them to us” (p. 287).

Let us focus on those handprints on the wall, artworks of human hands that manifest how the work of an individual can echo across all figures and colors and still look always human. It is no surprise that most cave visitors are visibly struck by the strange familiarity of those hands. It seems easy to name *what* they look like. But *how* do they look that way? If anyone dares put his own hand on top of those on the wall then those prints become a literal expression of continuity across time and through the expansion of humanity. They become a “fact” of humanity, yet speechless, data-less, primordial.

I think we can begin to see this in the way that Lascaux’s painters provided no contextualization for their works beyond the very works; the handprint seems to conceal its method and overall purpose. Perhaps the fact that these people spent millennia drawing the same images on the walls again and again is even more indicative of a concealment of meaning; for, there is no need to return to the same work if it is already complete or fully understood. It is as if those images allowed people to slowly taste some intimate vision, but only within a chiaroscuro and removed from what was clear under the light of the Sun.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter I introduced the idea of a primordial sense of art as a window into the arts’ “invisible” educational qualities. In the first place, I have attempted to surpass the mainstream tendency to frame the arts in education as a set of transferrable skills by highlighting the qualities that emerge from an inquired practice with art. Along these lines, I presented music’s dynamic terms as an

example of artistic qualities that may yield unique educational potential when illuminated by daily rehearsal.

Second, I have tried to distill how these types of qualities allow us to see the arts as more than sciences, disciplines or forms of aesthetics. In particular, I have paid special attention to the arts' proper traits in comparison to those of the sciences to make a case for the challenges that art education faces today for, if mainstream education seems to be modeled on a scientific conception, then the arts have to adapt to that framework or rediscover their genuine place.

In the third place, I proposed to recuperate a primordial sense of art, a perspective framed by a making-knowing disposition where making supposes the unification of all productive elements, and knowing is closer to wonder conceived as rediscovering the work with amazement, and circulating around it to meet alternative ways of meaning.

In Chapter Three I will introduce Constantijn Koopman's "art as fulfillment" (2005) and Claudia Ruitenberg's "art-that-is-other" (2002) as notions that emphasize primordial positions against the *status quo* of the arts in education. Then, I will propose Igor Stravinsky's "respiration" (1975) as a synthesizing alternative to those previous ones. We will pay special attention to the way this latter perspective may help articulate an approach to art *as* educational *per se* rather than as an addition *to* or a detour *from* education. Finally, I will offer an art-based example that will assist in distilling three pedagogical implications contained in this approach to art.

### Chapter 3. Art *as* respiration

The field of Philosophy and Education has had an ambivalent relationship with the arts. After a major outburst of research and scholarship that peaked during the seventies and eighties through the work of scholars with diverse views, such as Monroe Beardsley, Nelson Goodman, Louis Arnaud Reid, there has been a tacit retreat before the results-based strength and public support of psychological perspectives. What was in principle aimed at inquiring about the arts as semblances of the good life, as instances for symbolic alphabetization, or as ways of humanistic knowing has given way to a scientific approach to the arts. As discussed in Chapter Two, based on current understanding of education, the arts have been framed as skills, disciplines, or complements to the sciences.

The following chapter is an attempt to reevaluate the assumptions behind what is commonly understood to be educational in the arts by examining two intriguing arguments for their intrinsic value. I will first consider Constantijn Koopman's "art as fulfillment" (2005) and Claudia Ruitenberg's "art-that-is-other" (2002) as notions that emphasize primordial positions against the *status quo* of the arts in education. Then, I will propose Igor Stravinsky's idea of "respiration" (1975) as a surpassing alternative to the previous ones. We will pay special attention to the way these three positions may help articulate an approach to art *as* educational *per se* rather than as an addition *to* or a detour *from* education. Finally, I will offer Maurice Ravel's Bolero as an example that helps distill three pedagogical implications contained in this approach to art: the consideration of art's time in education; of its room; and of its overall sense of experiment.

### “Art as fulfillment”

In 1977, Hans-Georg Gadamer published an essay titled “The actuality of the beautiful” in which he discusses the phenomenon of art from the viewpoints of play, symbol, and party. In the third and final section of the work, “Art as celebration,” he characterizes two fundamental experiences of time.

There is one type of time “for something” or “to do something.” This is the conception of time that supposes an original lack that needs to be filled in, as if from the outside. It is a time whose value depends on the quality of its occupation, for we can use it for better or worse activities. It is a time we can spend either in the boredom of not knowing what to do or the extreme busyness of doing too many things. This is the kind of time that follows a progressive trajectory from the past to the future, a time that we can lose or earn, negotiate or regret.

Then, there is a fulfilled time that Gadamer exemplifies with the celebration of a feast, a happening that is both complete and actual. It is complete in the sense that it goes beyond the anxiety of navigating time between its use or misuse, lack or completion. This is a sense of time that positively affirms that a party congregates everything and everyone. This is to say that during the celebration nothing is missing and nothing is sought for or regretted, for the party feels already complete by the coming together of its members and elements. Rather than looking to be filled-in by occasional characters, activities, or things, the party already supposes “full-filled” time.

Furthermore, Gadamer speaks of this time as being a present-based activity that “explicitly suppresses all representations of a goal towards to walk to” (p. 50). This is why, during the celebration, people seem to share the perception of abundance of duration: more

precisely, of the actual overruling of a succession of chained moments by an enlarged sense of immediacy that makes time stand still and invites us to linger together. The party *is* actualized time.

Constantijn Koopman (2005), Professor at the Dutch Royal Conservatoire, builds on Gadamer and signals this dual sense of celebratory time as a paradigm for the way in which the arts best collaborate with education, arguing that “as an organized whole, the work of art embodies a mode of fulfilled time” (p. 92). Koopman grounds his argument on a collection of artworks whose intrinsic order seems to establish each part where they correspond. This is why they bring forth a sense of completion that, in lacking nothing, invites the spectator to sustain his engagement with them without tiring. These are the works that exemplify “art as fulfillment” both in the sense that they provide a sustained gathering with the work as well as an immediate experience of it.<sup>12</sup>

As an example, Koopman refers to Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. What is particularly revealing in this artwork is that it is crafted in such a way that the person reading the text or attending the performance will eventually come to see the development of its plot, its characters’ motivations, actions, and speeches, and understand the drama’s meaning: that is, what constitutes friendship and betrayal. According to Koopman, in the crucial moment of the work

There is a flash of insight [...] intimated to us in the direct engagement with the work of art [where its] deeper meaning is suddenly revealed (p. 96).

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<sup>12</sup> Certainly Koopman (2005) is not alone. Senior scholars who have also tackled the crossroads between philosophy, art, and education, like Elliot Eisner and Phillip Jackson, seem to share this “fulfillment take” on art. For example: “The sheer joy of our interior and exterior landscape teach us what is to be fully alive” (Eisner, 2002). “On the making of art, the feeling associated with it is decidedly positive [...] When might people rejoice in what they are doing? When they were deeply convinced of their importance. When they felt it to be right, fulfilling, satisfying, rewarding, comforting” (Jackson, 2002).

However, Koopman acknowledges the existence of “some works of avant-garde art that can be indeed very disturbing” (p. 92)—like the one we will present in the following section—and that pose a threat to “art as fulfillment,” for they lack the inherent qualities of completing order and meaningful immediacy. What should we do before such art? Try to contextualize its historic, political, or educational origins, for these works typically emerge as reactions against decayed dogma, oppressive regimes, or repressive methods. In and of themselves, these works may eventually contribute to an enhanced experience of what fulfillment in the arts looks like, but only as a negative rule, by exemplifying their defective incompleteness. “No one seeks disorientation in the arts any more than one does in the rest of one’s life. Eventually, we want something positive” (p. 92).

The way in which Koopman further describes this quality of “positive art” helps us better understand his overall notion of “art as fulfillment.” Positive art seems to refer preeminently to an “existential experience [of] unsurpassed beauty, exceptional profundity, rapture and ecstasy” (p. 95). It is this type of experience that ultimately constitutes the core of Koopman’s arguments for the arts in education, for this experience raises the arts into the realm of fulfilling education: that is, “good life itself” (p. 96).

#### “Art-that-is-other”

Claudia Ruitenberg, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Education at the University of British Columbia, provides an alternative perspective to Koopman’s. Her point of view is that, regardless of their complete or immediate nature, those ways of dealing with the arts that aim at facilitating positive encounters hide a whole set of educational qualities that remain latent when they are explicitly needed in today’s education. For Ruitenberg, rather than focusing our attention on traditionally fulfilling



works, we should concentrate instead on those works of art that are demanding, anomalous, and weird:

I speak specifically of those works of art that address us from, as it were, another shore [...] they are works that are called “difficult,” “strange,” or “unfamiliar,” works that we can *ingest* but not *digest*, that we roll around uncomfortably in our perception, like a hot potato in our mouth (p. 452).

Before going on, it is important to highlight how the notion of “art-that-is-other” is rooted on the input of two authors that Ruitenberg has translated into the arts in education:

In the first place, in Douglas Aoki’s “pedagogical politics of clarity” (2000), and specifically in his critique against the value of “clarification” as the teacher’s key task in education. Aoki denounces how those texts that elude easy comprehension or those that the teacher is not able to break down for her students are typically left outside the school curricula as too challenging. Ruitenberg expands on Aoki’s sense of a difficult text and includes artworks in this critique, pointing out that “in an order of teaching that prides itself on its pragmatism, works of art that do not disclose a meaning that fits well, or that do not disclose a meaning at all, are useless” (p. 456).

Then, “art-that-is-other” would be purposefully complex and difficult to understand, refusing to “disguise its difficulty or the necessary incompleteness of its interpretation” (p. 452). And this would not be just a whim, but a definite decision to bring back into the educational scenario the willingness to deal with what is hard to understand. More precisely, “art-that-is-other” seems to emphasize the educational value of dealing with those artworks that at first glance disorient us by calling into question the very conditions that originally moved us to judge them as obscure.

In the second place, Ruitenberg nurtures her thinking on Jacques Derrida's critique of the "Western metaphysics of presence" in which he condemns the drive to assimilate meaning in a way that evades the actual complexities of what we consider "other." Ruitenberg seems to read Derrida as attacking unilateral understandings of what is alien, understandings that mainly reference what is already known and that ultimately preclude a rich encounter with what we judge as "other," specifically, the possibility to discover how that same "other" may unveil hidden common perspectives. This appears to be Ruitenberg's point when she suggests that "art-that-is-other [teaches] to live with the uncertainty and barriers to transparent meaning presented by otherness" (p. 452).

Thus, "art-that-is-other" should only be pursued as a lived experience with the work and not through some sort of translation; it should be almost completely self-referential, if not frameless. Ruitenberg acknowledges, however, that this type of art can only exist because of other works of art, and it can certainly be referred to, even in slippery and roundabout ways, other works of art. But there can be no direct interpretation of one work into another, let alone into a reality outside art. In general, "art-that-is-other" seems to arise as a reaction that emphasizes the reality of works of art "so unfamiliar and radically 'other' that the only adequate preparation may be to confess that we cannot be prepared for what is coming" (p. 452).

An example may help clarify my reading of Ruitenberg's intention here. In 1952, American musician John Cage composed a three movement piece titled 4'33'', renowned because its score commands the performer not to play his instrument for the entire duration of the work, that is, four minutes and thirty-three seconds.

Before the actual performance of the piece, the audience typically sees a musician coming onto the stage and sitting at a piano. During the entire duration of the piece, the performer only moves to open and close the keyboard lid three times to differentiate the piece's three sections. Then, the performance is officially over. This means that throughout the whole length of 4'33'' there is no music being played, at least not in the usual way we expect music to sound. At first glance, one could argue that the purpose of 4'33'' is indeed strange.

Now, given the existence of a work of art like 4'33'', it seems an educator would have the option either to continue describing the formal aspects of the work as if providing a framework to contextualize it and help the students understand what is going on during its performance, or perhaps attempt some manner of philosophical explanation that could justify this apparently *silent* music. Richard Taruskin (2009), Professor of Musicology at the University of California at Berkeley, has tackled both possibilities:

Taruskin (2009) explains that Cage's work does four things: Most radically, it confronts the long-established notion of silence understood as the lack of noise and the amount of silence that a musical piece may include within its measures.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, it challenges the very definition of music by proposing an inquiry on whether environmental and accidental noises can be accepted as music, and, if so, under which conditions. Furthermore, it questions the traditional views on the authorship of music, for the noise

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<sup>13</sup> It seems that right after the first performance of the piece, Cage himself attempted a similar justification, arguing: "They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out" (Kostelanetz, 2003).

produced by each the members of the audience, together with the physical environment, actually compose and perform 4'33''. Finally, it produces a statement on whether the audience's reaction to a work is part of that work, questioning the social conventions of concert hall etiquette.

However, regardless of the many interesting musicological and philosophical implications that one may continue to distill from 4'33'', I think Ruitenberg's point is precisely that in trying to explain works like this one based on what we traditionally understand music to be, and commenting on it with commonsensical, discursive language, we ultimately suppress or counterfeit the work's "otherness." We could take an exhaustive music history course on Cage's 4'33'', learn a vast amount of data about the work, and yet never actually experience the *silent* performance of the work, never learn a thing about or, more precisely, *with* the work itself.<sup>14</sup>

As we referred to in Chapter 2, this may be the sense in which Merleau-Ponty (2004) states "It is more accurate to say that I see according to it [the artwork], or with it, than I *see it*" (p. 296). Art calls for a peculiar conformity between work and person where the emphasis is on their very relationship rather than on an object that needs to be justified or further developed. In this line, art seems to allow for the possibility to hold the world in suspense without delivering answers or explanations and yet suggesting an alternative way

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<sup>14</sup> Recently, Nakia Pope (2011) has argued that Cage could have hoped to incite some form of educational inquiry about 4'33'' in the audience but that, ultimately, he did not have "much of an obligation to facilitate it" (p.117). I cannot agree with this assertion. If we take Cage's words in footnote number Eleven seriously, and build on Ruitenberg's "art-that-is-other," I think we can affirm that 4'33'' itself constitutes Cage's "argument" about music. Perhaps, "facilitating it" would account for telling the audience what to listen and how to listen to what Cage was trying to perform.

of relating with the work, embracing all that visibly makes sense about it and what does not.

If I am reading Ruitenberg correctly, without this nuanced approach to be *with* the work, teachers would invariably confront a dilemma when introducing an artwork in their classrooms: If they tell students what to see, they reduce their learning to regurgitating both the teachers' insights and blindness. If they leave the students by themselves, they lose them and allow for no "positive" learning. I think "art-that-is-other" dismantles this "what to see, what not to see" tension, proposing instead an alternative perspective in the line of what Merleau-Ponty (2004) alludes above.

If, instead of trying to name or solve the explicit meaning of 4'33'', we take a step back into its reality as art, we may realize how this type of work helps to highlight the idea that what artworks present is not the same as what they represent. Put differently, works of art that are disconcerting may help us move pass the mere label that tells us what they stand for—or what we expect them to mean—and concentrate instead on their unmediated core significance. This is to say that in relating to 4'33'', we may relearn to appreciate *how* art means rather than just *what* it means or stands for (Ruitenberg, 2002).<sup>15</sup>

### Reconciling "Art as fulfillment" and "Art-that-is-other"

After considering both Koopman's and Ruitenberg's notions, I cannot help but agree that the primordial qualities of art that they describe are indeed educational. What is more, I think "art as fulfillment" and "art-that-is-other" together create an arch of intrinsic

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, Margaret Mason (2008) has continued Ruitenberg's argument, highlighting "the transformational qualities of learning experiences that move through encounters with slippage, incoherence and evasion, and insist on engagement [...] provoke new relations of thought and understanding within the processes of questioning and reconceptualization that characterize encounters with what is yet to be known."

justifications that bypass the actual conundrum of standardized methods and assessments and have the merit of opening new room for further inquiry on the arts as educational *per se*, while rejecting at the same time traditional instrumentalist views.

However, I want to indicate that their distinctive emphases seem to emerge as a *reaction against* mainstream art education. This presents no complication from an argumentative point of view, for they artfully pick their adversaries to better portray “art as fulfillment” and “art-that-is-other”. What I find problematic is that in doing so, in defining their positions in opposition to current circumstances, their actual contributions become barely relatable, if not completely isolated from each other in real educational practice.

This conclusion seems almost inevitable: If we are trying to highlight the arts’ potential to embody something like joyful completeness, this will be very difficult to reconcile with strangeness and paradox. Likewise, if we aim at illuminating how the arts present an alternative meaningfulness beyond conceptual boundaries, a way that assumes uncertainty and uneasiness as necessary qualities of art, we will have a hard time advocating simultaneously for the kind of existential fulfillment that the arts are able to facilitate. Evidently, it is difficult to hold together these two positions on common grounds.<sup>16</sup>

Still, I believe this quandary comes from the heuristic tendency to reify notions like “art as fulfillment” and “art-that-is-other” as irreducible and independent qualities. This

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<sup>16</sup> To the best of my knowledge, John White (1998), Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education at the University of London, is the only figure in the field of Philosophy and Education that has dedicated some work to this issue. I want to argue, though, that White’s interest seems to rest on developing “a view of human flourishing [where] conflicts coexist within a unitary framework (...) this has its obvious parallel in the contrasting elements held together within the framework of a work of art (...) Art may speak (...) in its mirroring of our psychic constitution as a whole.” This explicit turn to psychology makes his input a bit foreign to my own capacities.

challenge could be overcome if we approach these positions as suggesting exemplary features that are not only present in all art but also bear a peculiar educational dimension when intertwined with each other. I think Russian musician Igor Stravinsky's Poetics of Music (1975) contains some insights that may speak to this possible relationship.

### Stravinsky's "respiration"

During the academic year 1939-40, Stravinsky was invited to deliver the Eliot Norton Lecture at Harvard University, a venue in which artists usually provide a reflection on their own practice to a wide audience. On this occasion, Stravinsky focused each of his six lessons on specific aesthetic issues, some of which had to do with controversial issues at that moment, some others with the elements that constitute music as art. It will be relevant for our investigation to note that he decided to give the lecture in French.

On the second lesson entitled "The phenomenon of music," Stravinsky begins what I think is a philosophical inquiry on the origins of music, where he provocatively insinuates the notion of "respiration." As if anticipating the emphases that Koopman (2005) and Ruitenbergh (2002) would develop, he starts his argument proposing the existence of two types of music, the first of which he names "similar or unity," the second "contrast or variety".<sup>17</sup>

One which evolves parallel to the process of ontological time, embracing and penetrating it, inducing in the mind of the listener a feeling of euphoria, so to speak, of 'dynamic calm.' The other kind runs ahead of, or counter to, this process. It is not self-contained in each momentary tonal unit. It dislocates the center of attraction and gravity and sets itself up in the unstable (p. 31).

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<sup>17</sup> Certainly, the tension between contrast and similarity do not match exactly the contrast that I see Koopman and Ruitenbergh drawing. The point is that because "respiration" engulfs the interpretative extremes of similar and contrast, it could allow us to surpass the centrifugal trajectories that "art as fulfillment" and "art-that-is-other" seem to be following.

It is important here not to confuse these notions with either abstract or reified principles, for they seem to be interpretative terms instead. Stravinsky refers to them as “methods, like polychromatics and monochromatics in the plastic arts correspond respectively to variety and unity” (p. 32). The word choice is not capricious, for “method” carries the original meaning of the Greek *metaodos*, literally, “a way of doing something” (Liddell, 1996), not a finished or independently existing being. Thus, Stravinsky seems to be suggesting on the one hand that “similar and contrast” actually serve as ways of going about the practice of music as primordial criteria on how to approach artistic themes, materials, and techniques; and, on the other hand, that these are not exclusively musical methods but that we can find variety and unity in every art form.

Furthermore, it is clear for Stravinsky that similarity and contrast cannot exist in isolation or be comprehended as dualistic-like notions. This seems indeed a false option that would denaturalize art, for “the coexistence of both is constantly necessary, and all the problems of art [...] revolve ineluctable about this question” (p. 32). And still, in the very practice of art it seems we have to prioritize one of them. How can this be possible? Let me try to clarify this point with Stravinsky’s confession on how he deals with his own process of making music:

I have always considered that in general it is more satisfactory to proceed by similarity rather than by contrast [...] Variety surrounds me on every hand. So I need not fear that I shall be lacking it, since I am constantly confronted by it. [...] Contrast is everywhere. One has to take note of it. Similarity is hidden, it must be sought out, and it is found only after the most exhaustive efforts (p. 32-33).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Paraphrasing this same argument: “What it [similarity] loses in questionable riches, it gains in true solidity. Contrast produces an immediate effect. Similarity satisfies only in the long run” (p. 32).



One may be struck by the affirmation that contrast surrounds us while similarity has to be achieved through a sustained effort, something which is preferable in the end, at least for Stravinsky. There seems to be a tension here between similarity and contrast being co-existent and having to favor one of them in the making of art. However, in the way I read Stravinsky, I think that the similarity he chooses as certainly more “satisfactory, solid and valuable” (p. 33) does not simplify what is unsatisfactory, unstable, and worthless but rather grants the conditions to assume both sets of qualities as complementary, as if thickening the density of how music could be. This is to say that regardless of the method one chooses to emphasize, the other one could be engulfed in a common process. Thus, we could understand similarity and contrast as interchangeably following “nearby and remote resemblances” –as we will develop in Chapter Four when discussing *mimesis*– rather than “identical and contradictory trajectories.”

Without trying to force his words here, I believe this is precisely what Stravinsky argues when he further portrays the relationship between similarity and contrast:

Like the drawing together and separation of poles of attraction [that] in a way determine the respiration of music (p. 36).

A few words on the language of this quotation will justify the interest I have in it. Truly enough, the translator’s English word choice sounds awkward, for he is trying to literally translate the phrase *détermine la respiration de la musique* that Stravinsky used in the original version of the text. The rather old-fashioned “respiration” comes from the Latin *re-spirare*, literally “re-spiration” in English, that is, “the single complete act of breathing [composed by the aspiration and expiration of air into and from the lungs]” (Agnes, 2002). It is in this sense that contrast and similarity complementarily diversify and unify “like the

drawing together and separation of poles of attraction” (p. 36). This turns out to be a dialectic that, instead of destroying or dissolving its intrinsic elements, depends on them as conditions to sustain all music.

Furthermore, the English translation may also bias our understanding of *détermine*, literally “to determine,” inducing us to assume contrast and similarity as setting the limits of music in the sense of constraining all musical possibilities in between them. Once again, the original French is revealing, for respiration can incorporate in French the English sense of “breath” (Agnes, 2002), adding to the mere act of breathing the opening of a room or time in which to exert respiration in new ways. I am prone to believe that Stravinsky is at least insinuating the notion of respiration as positively determining music, as if granting the conditions for musical possibilities to dwell in this breath.

Put differently, what I believe this philosophical notion of “respiration” does is to reframe what we expect the process of music to be, granting the conditions to make music with the collaboration of previously unrelated extremes. An example will unfold the point. In the time Stravinsky was writing Poetics of Music, there was a major debate over consonance and dissonance in music:

Consonance, says the dictionary, is the combination of several tones into a harmonic unity. Dissonance results from deranging this harmony by the addition of tones foreign to it [...] Let us light our lantern! In textbook language dissonance is an element of transition, a complex interval of tones which is not complete in itself and which must be resolved to the ear’s satisfaction into a perfect consonance (p. 34).

Paraphrasing the relationship between similarity and contrast, the issue at stake here was not whether the musical lexicon was wrong, as if dissonance and consonance literally meant something *else*, but that they could mean something *more*. For Stravinsky, it seems

the challenge was to adopt *dis*-sonance and *con*-sonance as another set of ways in which music could *respirate*. From this perspective, they both open new possibilities beyond how we normally expect music to sound. Consider, for example, how, in listening to music, we tend to resolve the chord that has been left undrawn or dissonant (p. 34) or how we seem to have a foretaste of the music that is yet to come (p. 54). Music does not claim to have something to explicate, and yet it breathes possibilities for us to choose and make sense of the work. From the viewpoint of “respiration,” it seems we can always reach for the unclear or incomplete in the work and assume its meaning in a way which is certainly not definitive, and still allows us to culminate the artwork each time in an alternative plenitude of meaning.<sup>19</sup>

### Respiration and education

After considering the notions of “art as fulfillment,” “art-that-is-other,” and “respiration,” I think we are in the position to illustrate how Stravinsky’s perspective may lead into genuine educational qualities that could further enrich the current debate about the arts in education. Along this line of thought, I want to suggest that “respiration” impacts the quality of the room we concede to art in education, the amount of time art demands, and the overall sense of experimentation it offers. An example will help develop these three characteristics:

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note Adorno’s (1964) assertion, “The cracks and fissures in Stravinsky were not defects or stimuli, but attempts to import this fiction into the work of art as a formal element. So as not to succumb to the fiction, he wished to make it audible to the reflective mind” (p. 214). I think that this effort to make music manifest the interpretative decisions that the composer takes—to make the “method” become the music—helps us approach not only Stravinsky’s music but revisit Cage’s 4’33’’ in comparison with Pope (2011) and Taruskin’s (2009) positions.

In 1928, Maurice Ravel composed Bolero, a sixteen-to-eighteen-minute piece originally designed for a ballet. It is a rather easy piece to remember once one has listened to it for the first time because of its obstinate rhythm. The pair of measures below shows the rhythmical heart of the music that a single snare drum constantly repeats—169 times—throughout the entire duration of the piece:



At first sight, it may seem a barely remarkable piece of music, an opinion sustained by Ravel himself (Orenstein, 1990):

There are no contrasts [in Bolero], and practically no invention except the plan and the manner of execution [...] [Bolero] constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from, or anything more than, it actually does achieve (p. 447).

From the standpoint of Koopman (2005) or Ruitenberg (2002), one could be tempted to seek for justifications either in favor of or against Ravel's statement: that is, either Bolero manifests a complete encounter with the work that eventually elicits a standstill feeling of euphoria, or it renders an opaque version of what music is capable of, leaving all those engaged with it with an uncomfortable sense of a lost opportunity to draw some meaning from it.

However, from the point of view of "respiration," I want to argue that Bolero can be viewed as a peculiar rendition of the relationship between those interpretations. Thus, let us focus on Ravel's self-assessment and try to discover what the "respiration" of art can make of it and of the whole of Bolero.

“There are no contrasts” in Bolero

What type of contrast do we expect art to illuminate? Imagine what would happen if we could listen separately each one of the rhythmical measures that build up this music. We would find then that they are all identical. No doubt. And I think Ravel’s self-critique goes along these lines. However, if we pay attention to the way these measures are being reformulated throughout the score and we listen to how the same theme evolves in resemblance, we see how it is never identical. In other words, every time the rhythm reintroduces itself, it both recalls the very beginning of the work from which it springs and projects the whole work into something other that is new while being always similar.

The image of an explorer who travels across a piece of land he is trying to map out may further qualify this example.<sup>20</sup> At first, he confronts a range of mountains and can only tell the difference between peaks and valleys and the arid and fertile areas. Although he really walks, he does not seem to be moving, as his gigantic surroundings appear to remain unaltered. But, as he progressively enters the mountains, step by step, he gains a clearer perspective that allows him to see more in the smallest details that build his scenario. Slowly, he realizes that the original curtain-like image of a single mountain range gives way to a profound variety of intermediate valleys that now populate his way. He certainly walks the same mountain but, every time, he walks an ever rich and diverse mountain. I want to argue that Bolero, together with those engaged with it, are like this explorer whose viewpoint becomes more acute as he keeps walking and discovering how to see new paths to travel.

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<sup>20</sup> I came to develop this example while reading Gustave Thibon’s discussion on the ideas of culture and instruction (Thibon, 1965).

How this happens already accounts for the preliminary quality that a “respiration” approach to art can offer as educational; that is, illuminating unseen strata where there used to appear monolithic facts. Certainly, this thicker layering is not an issue of quantitative enlargement by the addition of information about the artwork but a peculiar expansion where our relationship with the work is no longer framed by what we feel or what we can say about it, but rather how we allow ourselves to meet different interpretative ways that resignify what a work of art means.<sup>21</sup>

I am reminded here of Merleau-Ponty’s claim that the depth we meet in reality makes impossible the fabrication of something like a definitive perspective in art, that is, a final adequate way to see art (p. 306). All we can aspire to see are different thickenings, as if the artwork became a prism with which we could illuminate some aspects of reality while hiding others but we were never really able to *see it* completely. Put differently, as we referred to in Chapter Two when discussing the circulation quality of wonder, moving through the perspective through which we meet art supposes assuming that there are always new venues to discover but never a final avenue to ride along.

In everyday educational practice, this layering of meaning demands the necessary room for students to move from conceptual backdrop-like views of the work into the discovery of its hidden valleys. In this sense, Ruitenberg (2002) offers a way of creating the necessary room to be with art that I find compatible with “respiration.” She argues that “a teacher does not establish a focus for listening to, looking at, or reading the work. Students are given the freedom and responsibility to be with the work” (p. 458). It is true that within our current educational environment the presentation of such a frameless learning scenario

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<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Guernica’s discussion on Chapter Two.

will probably prepare students to expect something unusual, but I think the overall emphasis ought to be placed on seeking to open up room to be *with* the work.

Certainly, both for teachers and students, this implies running risks like the explorer who is before the mountain. It may be the case that some take a picture of the mountain range after walking two steps, only to conclude that “This is the mountain.” Some others may choose to create a perfect map that resembles every nuance and yet still conclude the same as those before them. A group in the class may compose an “Ode to the mysterious valley” that states that no mountain can be actually known, only its partial valleys. Others will purposefully choose to “respirate” the mountain, and will inevitably get lost here and there, exposing unseen spaces and submerging others. As long as they decide to venture into the hills, wandering the valleys instead of responding to them, the mountain will eventually bloom with them, layer by layer.

I think that art demands for the kind of space comparable to that in Bolero’s rhythmical pattern: While it expands, developing the music, it contracts toward the same original theme; while it allows us a foretaste of sameness, it surprises us with the gift of newness each time.

#### Bolero has “practically no invention”

The way we understand “inventive” is decisive here, for it seems Ravel suggests that Bolero is hardly a “creative deed” (Agnes, 2002), something we usually expect from an invention and are prone to demand from the arts in education. In general, it looks as if we searched for originality in invention in the hope of seeing something for the very first time. Still, the Latin etymology of invention, *in-venire*, literally means “what comes to us” or “what we find” (Lewis, 2002), highlighting the instance of meeting something, regardless

of the number of times this encounter may have already taken place in the past. Thus we can ask: What is it that we meet upfront in Bolero? A vast amount of repetition.

Here, I would distinguish two ways of understanding repetition: On the one hand, repetition can be understood as the process that produces some sort of replica over and over again. This is the type of repetition mainly valued in terms of how well its product follows an original, and this is why we see a Rodin or Dali sculpture priced according to the number of copies available in the world. The extreme within this perspective lies in the technological over-stimulation of repetition that ultimately renders both original and copy flavorless, as in the case of “classic” artworks used as propaganda.<sup>22</sup> We will return to this point in Chapter Four when discussing *mimesis*.

On the other hand, we have repetition in the etymological sense of the Latin *re-peto*, literally, “to ask once again” (Lewis, 2002). What this means is that repetition is closer to reformulating a question on the same theme than to hammering a formless material into a copy. This take on repetition calls for a two-way relationship between the artwork and myself where both have the potential ability to speak to the other. —We will further develop this point in Chapter Four when discussing how *poiesis* supposes a relational and mutually creative process— In other words, repetition suggests a revisiting in the hope of dis-covering more than what was visibly available at first hand, for no one would ask again if he knew in advance a reply would be impossible. But the question still remains as regards how revisiting the same may allow us to find something new. Why not?! I want to propose that such a question is, in fact, invalid, for it frames the expectations about art within the linear trajectory of scientific progress we discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>22</sup> Fatefully, Bolero has suffered such a downgrading in the past.



It seems we have the tendency to see a paradox in suggesting something like a “creative repetitiveness.” But let us consider for an instant the possibility of rejoicing with an artwork that resembles the same exemplar time and again. Let us perceive Bolero as challenging us to wonder what it is that Ravel saw in its theme that kept him coming back to it 169 times, as if asking the same question over and over again.

I think Bolero is an example of those works that grant access to one of the most fulfilling senses of invention that art educators may find: that which emerges from dwelling with such a rich theme that one feels no anxiety to make something other than a portrayal of the same rendition. This may sound puzzling, but I believe this is not such a strange phenomenon if we move beyond Bolero and reflect on those sets of cherished works of art we all seem to preserve and revisit throughout our lives, as noted on Chapter Two when discussing the duration of prehistoric painting. It looks as if this repeated encounter with these particular works yields a sense of newness that complements those previous encounters.<sup>23</sup>

This act of re-visitation guides us to the second pedagogical consideration of art’s “respiration” because the opportunity to meet the work once again demands time, both in the sense of duration and of slowing down of perception. As duration, we can echo Gadamer’s consideration of time (1977) to justify that art cannot be framed within a lack of material time. To begin with, in the actual case of Bolero, this means having access to a full

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<sup>23</sup> As historic examples, I would like to include in this category the “still-life” that was first discovered in Egyptian tombs and is still taught in every Western art school. When people are fond of their art, they find it always new.

eighteen minutes to listen, that is, the piece's original extension, together with the sufficient amount of "extra" time to linger with the work.<sup>24</sup>

However, even in the case of actually having the necessary time to be with the artwork, the additional challenge with art is that it appears to require much more of our educational time. Eisner (2009) has recently indicated how this remains a paradoxical effort for mainstream arts in education where the persistent attributes sought in good students are typically those of being "bright," "fast," and "a quick read." The former example of the explorer has serious implications here, for if we rush through the observation of art, we are more than likely to miss alternative paths or not have enough opportunities to get lost in the work in the same way that if we speed up the music's *tempo* we risk confusing sounds that were supposed to be distinct and end up listening to a different piece than the one the composer created.

Coming to terms with the amount of time an artwork requires from us also means that we must agree to a change of pace, a slowing down of our expectations. This is particularly relevant when considering art forms that evolve in time before our eyes like theater, environmental installations, and music in general. The fact of knowing in advance that the natural progression of time will lead to some type of artistic climax should not prevent us from allowing those instances to manifest appropriately, in time. Put differently, allowing for the possibility to inquiry the work once again demands awaiting the work, this means giving the work and ourselves the time to come to each other, and restraining ourselves from impatiently anticipating that movement.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noticing how most of Bolero's versions are far shorter than the original, some running for only nine minutes.

I think this is another salient feature of Bolero because, with it, Ravel seems to purposefully slow us down. For, if we wait and give the music its proper time to develop, it will carry us from one measure to the next. Then, at any given moment, we may begin to discover how Bolero actually circulates its theme through all the orchestral instruments, steadily galloping toward a long crescendo of volume and harmonic intensity into a climax-like tension that would have been inconceivable in the beginning of the work. In conclusion, after a necessary amount of re-visitation, the same theme will reach the very boundaries of what it can perform and go beyond the limits of a single musical key, changing tonality right before embracing its *finale*.

#### Bolero, “a limited experiment”

Finally, let us consider Ravel’s assertion that Bolero is a very limited experiment, for it accomplishes nothing other than what it actually does achieve. This claim illuminates another quality of art that holds an additional pedagogical suggestion contained in the relationship between experiment and accomplishment. The way in which we understand “experiment” is crucial here.

As introduced in Chapter Two, there is a widespread sense of experiment, almost omnivorous in some areas of education that is archetypically represented by the scientific experiment. This is an experiment in the sense of a test in which a number of conditions are arranged in order to validate or refute a hypothesis. What is significant here is that these results constitute the experiment’s ultimate achievement, so that if the test cannot confirm or reject the hypothesis, it is worthless as such. In and of itself, this type of experiment is an instrument to prove something other; its aim is placed outside, inclined toward the result, so to speak.

However, there is an alternative understanding of experiment nurtured by the seemingly forgotten sense of “essay, rehearsal or attempt” (Agnes, 2002).<sup>25</sup> I want to argue that from the viewpoint of “respiration,” Bolero embodies this latter sense of a rehearsal experiment. I say “rehearsal” in two senses:

First, in the sense that a rehearsal is a continuous attempt. “Respiration” supposes the present, continuous, active voice form of art; as if one could say, in the style of Heidegger, “art *respirates*,” meaning that a work of art is a developing process, both physically and philosophically, rather than a *worked* or finished craft. Here, one could affirm that Bolero is in the making while it is being listened to or performed, as we will further develop in Chapter Four when discussing *poiesis*. This sense of rehearsal also speaks to art’s inherent incompleteness or, more precisely, “completing-ness.” Perhaps this is an easier quality to perceive in music, where the listener seems to carry with him all previous sounds and silences into what he is listening to at the moment, as if sustaining the whole of the work in progress as he listens.

Second, I think we can approach Bolero as a rehearsal experiment in the sense that it attempts to swap the expectation of achieving some type of result beyond its music—a skill, an idea, a good—for the wondering inquiry with its music: as if the rhythms and melodies became the lens to see Bolero, and Bolero became the explanation for its music. Put differently, the work of art could become its own way of interpretation, as if cognitive methods and learning products became one in the work.

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<sup>25</sup> Although beyond the reach of our present investigation, it is interesting to note that within the educational traditions developed in Romance languages, this understanding of “essay” is still alive. For instance, instead of asking for a “paper,” Spanish-speaking teachers call for an “ensayo,” which is French for an “essai.”

In considering everyday educational practice, this sense of experiment takes art to a new level that comprehends the previous considerations of time and space. Imagine a classroom teacher inviting her students to listen to Bolero with the premonition that the music will not achieve anything different from itself. Students enter the gap of conceptual definitions that Bolero suggests, they slow down in its creative repetitiveness, they come to perceive more than they can properly name. Some agree with each other, some refute, some contradict. Yet, hopefully, the work becomes the master criterion of its own meaningfulness. It enacts the sole reason and motivation of its performance.

### Conclusion

In this Chapter I introduced the notion of “respiration” as a means to begin illuminating how a primordial approach to art may actually look in education. In the first place, I offered a contrast between “art as fulfillment” and “art-that-is-other” as perspectives that emphasize mutually exclusive images of the arts in education. At which point I moved to overcome their dichotomy through the analysis of Stravinsky’s “respiration.”

In the second place, I stressed the way in which Stravinsky seems to suggest how the notions of “similar” and “contrast” can be approached as methods or interpretative lenses through which all art can be composed, performed and appreciated. I paid special attention to the fact that although in the actual practice of art we all seem to favor one of them, these ways are always coexistent, and that they positively determine the “respiration” in which art develops.

Finally, I presented Maurice Ravel’s Bolero as an art-based example that helps distill three pedagogical implications contained in this approach to art: first, in the sense

that respiration calls for emphasizing a multilayered interpretation of art beyond the univocal perspectives we may find at first hand; second, the consideration of art's time in education, both regarding its quantity for we need to secure the necessary time to allow the work to emerge and revisit it, and regarding its quality because we need to slow down our expectations about how the work will evolve; finally of its overall sense of rehearsal experiment, both in the sense that it is a continuous attempt, and that its practice becomes its actual purpose.

In Chapter Four I will consider the type of learning we can expect from this primordial take on art. In order to do this, I will attempt to rediscover the educational potential concealed within Poetics by focusing on Aristotle's insights on the specific pedagogical dimension of the arts. I will first guide our argument toward Aristotle's remarks on *poiesis*, understood as a "process of making." Then, I will focus on what constitutes the heart of *poiesis*, that is, *mimesis*. We will pay special attention to Aristotle's consideration of both *poiesis* and *mimesis* as ultimately dealing with human possibility.

#### Chapter 4. Art *as* an exercise in possibility

The field of Philosophy and Education seems to be experiencing a renewed interest in the work of Aristotle. As recently reviewed by Randall Curren (2010), Professor of Philosophy at Rochester University, most of this attention aligns with the virtue ethics movement where themes like moral development in education, friendship in the educational relationship, the demand for public education, and the inquiry on human flourishing as the aim of education are prevalent. For sources, this scholarship relies heavily and extensively on the Nicomachean Ethics and Politics' Book VIII where Aristotle develops his single, clearly defined account of education.<sup>26</sup> Among the short list of scholars who include Poetics in their research, their work seems to return to issues of morality and education (Carr, 2010; Gupta, 2010).

This chapter is an attempt to rediscover the educational potential concealed within Poetics by focusing on Aristotle's insights on the specific pedagogical dimension of the arts. I will first guide our argument toward Aristotle's remarks on *poiesis*, understood as a "process of making." Then, I will focus on what constitutes the heart of *poiesis*, that is, *mimesis*. We will pay special attention to Aristotle's consideration of both *poiesis* and *mimesis* as ultimately dealing with human possibility. I will finally provide an art-based example to show my interpretation of how possibility further qualifies the interaction between *poiesis* and *mimesis*.

What follows, then, is an interpretation of Poetics, with the assistance of contemporary philosophers inspired by Aristotelic ideas on art and education. By

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<sup>26</sup> In any case, what we could call Aristotle's "philosophy of education" is fragmented throughout his Corpus and may certainly be deformed by the variety of class notes that build on some of his treatises.

interpretation, I mean the mediation between two basic questions: What does Aristotle say about the arts in education? And what could that mean *vis-à-vis* our daily tasks as educators? Put differently, rather than composing a credible definition of *what* art education was for Aristotle, we will try to inquire into *how* art can be educational with the aid of Aristotle's text. This is why we will heuristically distinguish *poiesis*, *mimesis*, and possibility to try to gain a richer perspective of the way these aspects come together and emphasize distinct features of education.<sup>27</sup>

### Poiesis

Written *circa* 335 BC, Poetics is Aristotle's single elaboration on the nature of the arts and arguably the earliest-surviving investigation on the processes and rules of art making. Even in its current incomplete and fragmentary form, the text still exudes ambition: While the surface of the work deals with the main qualities to keep in consideration when producing a work of art, its underpinnings seem to suggest a peculiar relationship between *poiesis* and *mimesis* that is fundamental to learning. Aristotle introduces this relationship early on in the text:

*Poiesis* seems to have sprung [...] first from the instinct of *mimesis* present in man since childhood. One difference between him and other animals is that he is the most mimetic of all living creatures and through *mimesis* he learns his first lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in it [...] The cause of this is that to learn gives the liveliest pleasures [...] Thus, the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness, is that, in contemplating it, they find themselves learning and concluding "Ah, that is it" (1448b 4-17).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> I am aware that Poetics has historically stimulated Kantian, Hegelian, Croccian, and yet-to-be-discovered aesthetic explanations. My own intention is, if not free from controversy, at least grounded on the arts in education as a practice-based stronghold that will hopefully keep my argument within the real life of educators.

<sup>28</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references in this format correspond to Poetics.



This passage is central for us and many of the following remarks will involve wondering about it. We will begin by approaching the terms *poetic* and *poiesis*. The move between both will be crucial for our argument because it will allow us to think of *poiesis* as a comprehensive process that goes beyond the final production of artworks. With this in mind, we will build on Martin Heidegger's notion of *tekne* to illuminate how *poiesis* has a double dimension: First, it is a relational process that engulfs all elements in the process itself. Second, it is a human activity not only in the sense that it is developed by human beings, but specifically because it may reveal aspects of what it is to be a human maker in general.

The etymological origin of *poietic* is the Greek verb *poieo*, literally “to make, to fabricate, to build” (Liddell, 1996); it is the root of the English “poetic” and “poesy,” which we understand as “something characteristic of poets” and “a poem or body of poems” (Agnes, 2002). It is from this viewpoint that Aristotle's *poietic* is usually taken to mean the realm of artistic works, and one could argue that *Poetics*' object of study is certainly Tragedy and Comedy, those forms of poetry composed to be sung as rhapsodies and music of diverse instruments—in general, the dominion of the Greek Muses (1447a 13-15).

However, there is another Greek term also born from the verb *poieo* that Aristotle interchanges with *poietic*, that is, *poiesis*. While in English we tend to think of “poetic” and “poesy” as nouns or adjectives, *poiesis* carries a present continuous emphasis that allows us to interpret it as “the process of making” (Liddell, 1996). Thus, while Aristotle utilizes *poietic* to speak about the fields of drama, music, and dance, he also employs *poiesis* to signify the developing interaction between all *poietic* elements *as well as* the finished work

of such a process. I think we can see this articulation in the very first paragraph of Poetics when he states, “I propose to discuss about the *poietic* itself: Epic, Tragic, and Comic *poiesis*...” (1447a 8-13).

What I find particularly interesting about *poiesis* understood as a process of making is that it allows us to think of its many inherent elements as fusing in this same process rather than becoming parts of a product-making machine, so to speak. In the foreground, this means that all the artistic qualities that Aristotle distinguishes throughout Poetics (skill, technique, practice, artwork, etc.) could become synonyms of *poiesis*.<sup>29</sup> On a deeper reading, this suggests that *poiesis* refers to the reality of art making as an assimilating process. By this I mean a process whose constitutive qualities can only exist during the course of the process itself; as long as it is taking place, those qualities *are* the process.

As an example, let us consider *tekne*. This Greek word is the origin of the English “technique,” and is usually for Aristotle a synonym of “skill,” as exemplified in his many exhortations for poets to seek “artistic [*tekne*] correctness” (1461b 24). In general, out of the twenty-two times that he employs this term in Poetics, this is the usual sense that he gives to it. I think we can agree that there can be no art without skill and conclude that *tekne* is always a necessary component of *poiesis*. Still, as we referred to in Chapter Two, the fact that an artistic process demands skill is not sufficient *per se* to constitute it as *poiesis*.

In our contemporary worldview, Martin Heidegger (1993) helps further clarify this point when he elaborates on the idea of two clashing interpretations of *tekne*. On the one hand, we can understand *tekne* as “a means to an end” (p. 308) where technical skills tend

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<sup>29</sup> Even beyond Aristotle, the history of aesthetics is abundant with examples of how art can be understood as *praxis*, *tekne*, making, made craft, etc.

to emancipate themselves from the realm of human processes and begin to confront these processes as if from the outside. This is the perspective in which skills become autonomous tools and are prone to be subsumed under technologies. In addition, the overall criterion that guides these “means” is the ever efficient production of goods.

On the other hand, Heidegger proposes *tekne* as “a human activity” (p. 308).

Certainly this perspective also supposes the development of technological instruments, but their purpose is not to manufacture objects for consumption in the most efficient way possible. Instead, the emphasis is placed on “bringing forth” or “making present” (p. 329) the qualities that remain dormant within the conjoint activity of people and their works.

Consider the following passage as a counterpoint between both points of view:

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In sowing grain it places seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry (p. 325).<sup>30</sup>

I think Heidegger’s underlying lesson is that both the “peasant” and the “mechanized food industry” represent ways in which human beings relate with their makings. In this example, they both have to deal with agriculture as their task, and to develop this enterprise they need to fabricate helping tools. The difference lies

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<sup>30</sup> Although outside the reach of our present investigation, it is interesting to highlight that in What Is Called Thinking?, published in the same year as The Question Concerning Technology from where we take the quotation above, Heidegger has a passage in the first Chapter where he seems to introduce this same distinction between “means to an end” and “human activity” through the example of a cabinetmaker that learns his craft through his relationship with wood.

precisely in the quality of their relationship with the land and what they expect from it.

While the food industry does care for the amount of produce it is able to take from the field, it could not care less how this process affects the land. Industry does not consider the soil for the sake of the seed; instead, industry works the land only in order to benefit from its fruits. Strictly speaking, there is no cultivation here but use alone, in the sense that once the nutrients of one field are depleted, the use of the adjacent field will inevitably follow.

Conversely, more than aiming at producing goods from the land, the peasant seems to be concerned about ever sustaining this relationship *with* the land as a common task between the two of them. This should not be confused with *naïveté*, for to care for the land does not look different to the peasant than caring for himself. Without doubt, in time he will learn the seasons and weather, and the sowing and harvesting techniques that best help his crops grow. But, most importantly, I would risk saying that the peasant will eventually learn in a more profound way what it means to be a peasant, thanks to his relationship *with* the land.

After distinguishing these two senses of *tekne*, Heidegger's closing statement, "the *poiesis* of the fine arts was also called *tekne*," (p. 339) allows us to further illuminate Aristotle's *poiesis*. Heidegger's claim is not just philological analysis but the expression of a reality that was tangible for Aristotle and almost a paradox for us: technique, skill, and technology—and all other artistic qualities—are *poiesis*, conceived as the process of making an artwork. We seem to find such an explanation of Aristotle arcane because we have the all-too-concrete option to

understand technique, skill, and technology as detachable from any of our makings. Furthermore, today, perhaps more than in any previous era, the way we relate to *tekne* defines the relationship we have with what we make, for this seems to be *the* tool every educated person should handle with mastery in her daily labors.

I believe such a rupture would have been a chimera for Aristotle, and the way I see him bridging this gap characterizes the first educational indication we can learn from Poetics. *Poiesis* engulfs everything that we can at present think of as “art” or “artistic,” but not like fractions that build up something named “the work of art.” *Poiesis* is a relational process that sustains all its inherent elements while transforming them all in the process itself, in the way that plowing the land can neither be abstracted from the peasant’s care for it, nor from his hand holding the plowshare, nor from the seed growing into a plant.

Heidegger’s description of *tekne* also helps us perceive a second educational quality of *poiesis*, that is, its framing as human activity. This is to say that the relational process of making a work of art is not just carried out by people but is a process that manifests aspects of human beings as makers. If we find this statement awkward, it is probably because we are too used to conceiving production as a unidirectional process where people subjugate nature and its elements. It looks as if a distant and generic “me” would exert dominion over the world of objects, as if I could challenge my surroundings with the assumption that there will be no reply whatsoever.

Once again, I think such a fracture would have been fictional for Aristotle. *Poiesis* seems to be a two-way expansion of the human interaction with the world.

*Poiesis* supposes creative reciprocity; it is neither an anonymous making nor some type of non-responsive control over materials. Put differently, in *poiesis*, the working peasant and the land make each other, for, in the way that the child becomes a peasant because of his working the land, the land becomes fertile soil because of its interaction with the peasant.

At this point we have characterized *poiesis* as a relational process that supposes creative reciprocity. It follows naturally to ask what is it that differentiates *poiesis* from other forms of interaction between human beings and their works. I believe Aristotle would argue that *poiesis* must be *mimetic*.

### Mimesis

Now that we have already introduced *poiesis*, it is important not to lose sight of its tight connection with *mimesis*; let us bear in mind that “*poiesis* seems to have sprung [...] first from the instinct of *mimesis*” (1449a 4), and “through *mimesis* he learns his first lessons” (1448b 8). In this section we will unfold the meanings and relationships between these two quotations. First, we will tackle the etymology and translation of the key terms; second, we will pay attention to *mimesis*’ theme and its relationship with the development of likenesses as the actual matrix of possible learning through art.

The Greek verb that I translated for “have sprung,” and which relates *poiesis* and *mimesis* in the quotation above, is *gennao*, and it literally means “to engender” (Liddell, 1996). I believe this term allows us to read that *poiesis* comes from *mimesis* in a manner similar to breeding, as if *mimesis* was a parent to *poiesis*, so to speak. Strange as the description of this image may sound, I am persuaded to keep its biological reference because Aristotle explicitly places *mimesis* deep within our humanity. This is shown by the

fact that Aristotle calls *mimesis* an “instinct.” The Greek word is *physis* which we could also understand as “the nature” of *mimesis*, but it seems to me that this option would allow for all the complex nuances that “nature” carries with its interpretation. This is why I am choosing the alternative translation of “instinct,” for it sustains both the vital depth in which *mimesis* is located as well as its impulse-like capacity to bring *poiesis* forth.

In addition, a first approach to the term *mimesis* demonstrates that its morphology very much follows that of *poiesis*: it supposes a present continuous sense. Its root verb is *mimeomai*, literally “to imitate, to represent” (Liddell, 1996), and Aristotle uses it to name both the realm of artistic makings— “Epic, Tragic and Comic *poiesis* [...] are all modes of *mimesis*” (1447a 13-15) —as well as the process of developing those same artworks— Someone is “a poet because he exercises *mimesis*” (1451b 28). — For the moment, it will suffice not to rush into reducing *mimesis* to imitation or reproduction. Doing so risks dissolving its meaning into “something produced as a copy,” perhaps even with the negative implication of “counterfeit” (Agnes, 2002).

Moving on, we can see how decisive the relationship between *poiesis* and *mimesis* is for Aristotle when he affirms “it is *mimesis* that makes the poet” (1447b 14-15). Without trying to force his words, it seems *mimesis* ultimately grants the conditions for *poiesis* in the sense that we cannot engage in the process of making a work of art without assuming *mimesis* as the criterion to carry on such activity. *Mimesis* is the distinctive quality that an artist needs to embody. Once again, we need to refrain from understanding *mimesis* as imitation or else we would be arguing for something like “the artist’s task is founded on imitation” what looks like proposing the paradox, “to make art is to imitate.”

However, the introduction of the poet as the one who is defined by *mimesis* gives way to the following question: If *mimesis* is not mere copying or reproducing things, what is it that the artist actually produces through *mimesis* that would be missing without it? In other words, how does *mimesis* qualify *poiesis*?

The few explicit remarks that Aristotle has to offer in this sense point toward the same conclusion: *Mimesis* adds no “thing” to *poiesis*. Instead, it provides two conditions for *poiesis*. On the one hand, *mimesis* sets the theme for *poiesis*, stressing that it should focus on human life. On the other hand, and dependent on the previous point, *mimesis* suggests how that same theme ought to be developed through the creation of likenesses. It is only through these likenesses that *mimesis* would eventually favor learning.

#### The theme of *mimesis*

Let us consider Aristotle’s own explanation about what is it that constitutes the topic of *mimesis*:

What the poet produces through *mimesis* are the actions of men (1448a 1).

Tragedy is *mimesis* of praxis and life, not of men. And life consists in actions, and its aim is a type of action, not a quality (1450a 16-19).

This is a good example of Aristotle’s ability to be concise and dense. It is evident that what the poet produces through *mimesis* are actions, and that these actions are those of human beings. But what are those actions really like? If we take the reference to tragedy above as a specification of the broad theme of *mimesis*, I think we can affirm that these actions cannot be reduced to isolated acts or accounts of people consisting in descriptions of their qualities. *Mimesis* is basically concerned for human life. In other words, it is about



the expansive actions of people, practices that are continuous from the beginning until the end of life.

Atsuko Tsuji (2010), Professor at the Graduate School of Education of Kyoto University, further clarifies this point when he suggests that ultimately *mimesis* cannot have an object to imitate. Building on Walter Benjamin (1999), Tsuji proposes that “objects that can be imitated cannot exist prior to the occurrence of imitation as *mimesis*” (p. 130). *Mimesis* favors an opening up of human possibilities rather than an identification of static objects one may take as exemplary models. In this sense, *mimesis* seems to be not only chronologically anterior to imitation understood as reproduction, but also a philosophical precondition for the making of all artworks.

I believe Benjamin (1996) already insinuates this point when he argues that *mimesis* should not be a concern for the technical means of producing an artwork. Framing *mimesis* as production would risk reducing it to mechanical imitation;<sup>31</sup> and, as we said before, if we could attribute technique to one of the notions presented in Poetics that would be *poiesis* for the productive emerges like a continuation of *mimesis*:

All form, every outline that man perceives, *corresponds* to something in him that enables him to *reproduce* it. The body imitates itself in the form of dance, the hand imitates and appropriates it through drawing (p. 442).<sup>32</sup>

I think Benjamin’s distinction between what *corresponds* to human beings and what we are able to *reproduce* based on that “co-respondance,” expresses in modern language a

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<sup>31</sup> Although outside the scope of this investigation, one could argue that the essay “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” (1985) denounces what happens once *mimesis* is reduced to a reproductive power. In particular, Benjamin argues that technical reproduction eventually subsumes and becomes the real art, fragmenting the former elements of the work, removing it from its original locale, and pushing it to the comfort of people’s.

<sup>32</sup> My emphases.

characterization of *mimesis* that we can only begin to perceive in Poetics. As we will develop in the next section, *mimesis* focuses on the possible correspondences between people and their makings.

From this point of view, we can better understand Aristotle's remarks on tragedy above. Let us consider a handy example like *Romeo and Juliet*. What is it that Shakespeare could be "objectively" trying to represent? Is the aim of the play to give an account of Elizabethan events and criticize the deeds of the Montagues and Capulets? Could we care less about the actual names or how they are rhymed or the actual place or time they occupy? Is not the true artistic skill in which Shakespeare excels his ability to make a case for what is human, with all its perils and glories, and to show how this story may relate to every one of us?

However, by now someone could raise a real objection to our argument. What about works of art that do not seem to portray human life? Consider contemporary forms of art, for example an environmental installation like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's The Gates in Central Park (see below). Being consistent with our argument, if this work was produced through *mimesis*, it should manifest human life. Instead, all we can see are lots of wooden structures with orange cloth hanging from them. Would Aristotle—should we?—refuse to consider The Gates as a product of *mimesis*?



I believe there are two possible answers to this legitimate question: On the one hand, one could read Aristotle's claim that *mimesis* is about the actions and practices of human life as suggesting that the makings of every art—from whatever we may call “the most concrete” up to “the most abstract”—are implicitly a continuation of the *mimesis* instinct that all people share. In other words, there will always be human traces in art like there are aspects of the makers' hand that somehow remain in the work even when he touches it no more. From this viewpoint, one could conclude that all art is *mimesis* because it is made by human beings and, therefore, repeat with Terence, “I am a man, nothing human is strange to me” (1998).

The other possibility would be to argue, with the assistance of Politics' last chapter, that artistic elements like “figures and colors are not the products of *mimesis* but [its] signs” (1340a 33).<sup>33</sup> Here, one could read Aristotle as saying that the sensitive perceptions we feel are signs of *mimesis*, but not *mimesis per se*. In and of themselves, the combination of artistic elements does nothing for *mimesis* except provide its necessary material basis. What I believe defines *mimesis*' theme as human life is not so much *what* is being portrayed in the work but *how* human beings participate in bringing forth some type of meaning through their interaction with it, assuming that same meaning as an echo of their own life. In other words, artworks need to provide for some form of relatable venues that could be assumed *as* human life.

Think about what we could find out in considering The Gates as human life. Let us pretend we are in New York during the winter of 2005. The weather has been fluctuating

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<sup>33</sup> Whether this same line of thought was present in the complete version of Poetics is a matter of philosophical fiction. Still, I think it makes sense to presume that the distinction between *mimesis* and its signs was part of Aristotle's project there.

between extreme snowstorms and gorgeous, sunny days. By mid-February, I force myself to be brave enough to go downtown and check that new installation people have been chattering about. So I take the inbound Red Line and get off at 59<sup>th</sup> Street. In the moment that I set foot in Central Park, the rumor becomes real: all I can see are zillions of orange flags hanging over the walkways. It looks strange, to say the least. Still, my curiosity makes me move on.

As I begin walking, I am not really sure I am doing anything at all beyond circulating around the park. It is interesting to note how what looked like orange flags are actually rising—or falling—curtains. And the color is not exactly orange, it is closer to saffron. Now, the wooden frames create a really nice effect. For, as you walk through each of the three-poled structures, you get the feeling of following a straight line even though most of the walkways are curved. This perspective illusion is due perhaps to the rectangular shape of the different gates. People were right: this might be crazy art, but it has some interesting aspects worth noting.

However, as I keep walking, I somehow care less for what I see and begin wandering through The Gates. It is not easy to say why, but this entering and exiting each of the gates has some ineffable qualities that speak to me, perhaps because there are gates we go through in life and curtain calls we attend. There are some curtains that slap us in the face and oppressive backdrops that rise behind us; there are ripped curtains we break through and curtains we take down as the show of life goes on. As time goes by, I spend the day strolling through The Gates.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> I am aware that Rene Arcilla (2009) has recently argued that modernist abstract art serves to estrange us from ourselves. If I am reading him correctly that would not be a final stop

As usual, the example could be improved, but I think that walking around in The Gates accounts for the perspective from which we can approach *mimesis*' theme. Further objections could be raised, claiming that this is the same as relating anything to human beings. But such is not the case. As we will argue in the last section, many different things *could possibly* be related to human beings, but this very possibility depends, first of all, on discovering qualities that could operate as semblances between the work and me.

### Mimetic likenesses

Consider how *mimesis* grants the conditions for the very first learning experience of human beings:

Through *mimesis* he learns his first lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in it [...] The cause of this is that to learn gives the liveliest pleasures [...] The reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness, is that, in contemplating it, they find themselves learning and concluding "Ah, that is it" (1449a 15-17).

What specifically qualifies learning in Poetics is its dependence on "a likeness." Now, "likeness" comes from the Greek *eikon* from where we receive the English "icon." But, while in English we tend to understand icon as "a pictorial representation or image" (Agnes, 2002), the Greek in Aristotle's times sustained the multifaceted meaning of *eikon* as "likeness, semblance, and similitude" (Liddell, 1996). This is why I chose to translate *eikon* as "a likeness" to stress that it refers not to some "re-presented" or "re-produced" object but rather to a relationship between different things, a quality that cannot exist separately from them and can only be actualized by the simultaneous interaction of those two realities. As commented on above, *mimesis* supposes the means to produce these

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process but an opening into the opportunity to re-familiarize us again with ourselves. In any case, this is the type of dynamic that I think *mimesis* allows us to perceive in The Gates.

likenesses, but, specifically, *mimesis* seems to concern for the development of these likenesses as such: likenesses seem to be the actual “product” of *mimesis*.

It is important to highlight, though, that while the *mimetic* development of likenesses seems necessary for learning, the existence of likenesses between the work and myself is not sufficient to constitute learning. It appears as if all the artist could do is to arrange his work in such a way that these semblances between different realities could possibly be illuminated, and yet, they seem to be expecting, as if gravid, a personal vision that could then give way to the conclusion, “Ah, that is it.” In other words, *mimesis* is necessary for learning, but not sufficient for it.

In my view, this interpretation is strengthened by Aristotle’s use of the term *orontes* as an adjective of *eikon*. In the quotation above, what people enjoy is “*orontes eikon*,” that is, “seeing a likeness.” *Orontes* is the active gerund of the Greek verb *oreo*, literally “to see” (Lidell, 1996), which then allows us to read that it is in the process of *seeing a likeness* that human beings may be able to learn something. Learning does not depend on a likeness that has already been seen or will be seen but on *seeing a likeness become a likeness*, so to speak.

As Christine Doddington (2010), Senior Lecturer in Education at Cambridge University, states:

It is not the veracity of likeness that is key to judgment here, but what the artwork can eventually reveal beyond mere replication of appearance—the unseen that is made visible—[...] [We should not] overlook the *process and possibilities of looking to recognize and reveal* truth that lies beyond surface appearance (pp. 583-584).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> My emphasis.

I think this quotation helps synthesize our argument and suggest the main educational contributions *mimesis* has to offer. First of all, Doddington reiterates Benjamin's and Tsuji's point regarding the relationship of *mimesis* to the reproduction or replication of objects. What *mimesis* does is to emphasize resemblances to be perceived between realities, not blurry labels to be verified against a map legend. This is to say that its process implies tracing possible relationships, the "unseen that is made visible." It supposes the disclosure of connections that would have remained hidden if this particular artwork would not have suggested them.

*Mimesis* also highlights the effort that such a task entails because "looking to recognize" supposes that we dispose ourselves to "re-knowing" what we thought we knew in an original way, a *mimetic* way. This does not mean to make what we recognize fit our previous scheme, rather the opposite: it allows for the possibility of re-learning something in a way that reformulates what we knew. Put differently, the seeing of likenesses is a life-long opportunity to reveal new likenesses each time.

*Romeo and Juliet* is once again helpful here. Consider someone being exposed to this play for the first time. A late sixteenth-century play written in old English rhyme. A plot consisting of two noble families whose common animosity ends up taking the lives of both their heirs. The whole tragedy sparked by the fact that a friar's letter never made it to Mantua in time. By the way, where's Mantua? And why didn't someone call Romeo to let him know the plan to have Juliet sleep as if dead for some hours? Were there no phones back then?! The obstacles for

learning through *mimesis* seem to be too many; as commented on above, suggesting a likeness does not guarantee learning.

Then again, if the audience remains in their seats, some signs of revealing recognition may occur. Consider Capulet, that aggressive and hateful father. A true tyrant! But is it aggression and hate that best characterize him? He seems to be sorry for the bygone days, the good old days, somewhat melancholic. And in comparing his wife to Juliet, he speaks of withering beauties that are too early harvested. This man is the head of a family clan, and he has only one daughter. He probably wants her to be happy but knows well in advance that the human condition is subject to the miseries of time and fatigue. How do we help someone we love to grow up in a world filled with pain?

The example is certainly improvable, but I believe the point is clear. All forms of learning through *mimesis* are embodied in a version of Aristotle's, "Ah, that is it." In this case, "it" does not have to be a Capulet or a Juliet, it could very well be a feeling we do not yet have a name for. It could be a mixture of emotions with melancholic qualities. It may read as "melancholy" in the text but speak to the whole of human life as it is spoken and listened to in the classroom, on the bus, or at home.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Someone might argue that I am talking here about learning through catharsis rather than through *mimesis*. However, I would like to bring attention to the following considerations: In the first place, in Poetics, catharsis is exclusively restricted to tragedy: "Tragedy is *mimesis* of praxis [...] accomplishing through fear and pity the catharsis of these same emotions" (1449b 24-28). There would be no catharsis about The Gates, for example. What is more, of all the sixty-six times that Aristotle uses *any* compound of this word in his Corpus, he only utilizes catharsis twice in Poetics. In his biology treatises, where he uses the term fifty-eight times, catharsis is a synonym for the release of organic material:



So far, we have established that the type of learning that Aristotle describes in Poetics is framed by *mimesis*' double suggestion: On the one hand, looking to recognize human-like semblances in the artwork; on the other hand, revealing new aspects of those same semblances. *Mimesis* allows us not only to see the artwork under a new light but also to wonder about the resemblance-like relationship we develop with the work. It is as if through *mimesis* we were able to approach the artwork as something other, something different from us that nonetheless insinuates a certain correspondence with us, as Benjamin (1996) and Doddington (2010) argue.

Two questions seem to follow: What is it that differentiates *mimesis* from relating anything that could allegedly be called human with any random resemblance we may find in the artwork? And how would we characterize *mimesis* as a perspective on art that educators can manage to identify and help students develop while remaining true to Aristotle's indications? I believe Aristotle would answer both questions by arguing that *mimesis* needs to be possible.

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typically, milk, blood, the placenta, semen, ovules, etc. Thus, I would argue that catharsis is more of a modern scholar's concern than an Aristotelian one.

In the second place, catharsis is only about the cleansing of pity and fear. This is problematic when considering tragedies that depend on other feelings. For example, the likenesses that were revealed in re-experiencing Capulet's character would be outside catharsis' realm because they seem to be closer to love or melancholy.

Finally, it is not clear what happens with these passions once they are released, for it appears the spectator has no opportunity to revisit them. Put differently, whatever we may learn from tragedy—if anything at all—we would be deprived of reevaluating pity and fear as constitutive to that same learning.

### The possible

In this final section, I wish to make a case for possibility as a quality that further expands the understanding of both *poiesis* and *mimesis* as conditions of the types of learning that Aristotle suggests in Poetics. We will first attend to Aristotle's characterization of the possible as that which distinguishes *poiesis* from history. Then I will present the notion of art as an exercise in possibility, embodying two complementary qualities: On the one hand, the framing of the possible within a single concrete work of art; on the other hand, the expansion of that same possible as a standard that helps "re-appreciate" previous makings and prepare future ones.

As we have seen in the previous section, Aristotle introduces the notion of learning in Poetics as related to a preliminary insinuation of human likenesses. We showed how the development of these likenesses—of the conditions that allow us to see them—is what constitutes the work of the artist as *mimesis*. What is still ahead of us is to find out how this development looks in practice. Aristotle has a straightforward characterization of this task:

It is clear from what has been said that the poet's task is not to narrate what has happened but what could happen, what is possible [...] The historian and the poet do not differ by writing in verse or in prose (Herodotus might be put into verse and it will still be history with or without rhyme). The true difference is that one narrates what happened, the other what may happen. *Poiesis*, therefore, is more philosophical and noble than history (1451b 1-5).

Understanding who Herodotus is for Aristotle will help us make sense of this passage. This is the only time that Aristotle mentions him in Poetics, and he names him ten times in the Corpus that reaches our era. In each instance, Herodotus is quoted as an authority regarding the past, the famous world traveler and author of the Nine Books of History. And even though the Greek term for "history," *istoria*, is usually understood as

“learning by inquiry” (Liddell, 1996), Aristotle’s use of the term appears to be circumscribed to “*an account of one’s inquiries, a narrative*” (Liddell, 1996). For example, in the treaty On the Generation of Animals (1952), Herodotus seems to be just a narrator of his experiences and past life events, essentially a “storyteller” (756b 6).

But the narration of the past as such is not what condemns history as less philosophical than *poiesis*. What is decisive here is that history deals with events that happened regardless of their probability, whereas poets make something that is possible happen. “Even if the poet takes a theme from actual history he is nonetheless a poet for some historic events may be probable and possible” (1451b 29-31). It seems as if, for Aristotle, history is a static reality materialized by actions that originated in the past and were fully over in the past; already accomplished facts, so to speak. The only thing we seem to be able to do with it is to retell it and, even if we can relate to it and find similarities between history and present people, those similarities are stagnant at one end of the relationship.<sup>37</sup>

The activity that the poet carries out is of a different nature: it is *mimetic poiesis*, after all. We should take into account that most of the examples that Aristotle utilizes in Poetics come from the early Greek rhapsodies of Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. In their works, these artists have not copied the facts of history as if they were chronicles, nor have they produced accounts of human life that people would find impossible to relate to. What they have done is to create images of the possible: exercises in possibility that their contemporaries and we can relate to while considering different qualities of resemblances.

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<sup>37</sup> Although the nature of history is outside the scope of our investigation, it is fair to acknowledge that Aristotle’s research style typically included a brief literature review. This critical evaluation was located as an introductory chapter and used as the stepping-stone from which to carry on his inquiry, as he does in Physics, On the Soul, and Metaphysics.

Once again, it is helpful to keep in mind both Romeo and Juliet and The Gates as examples of how Aristotle's sense of *mimetic poiesis* might look today.

Moving on, we can argue that what makes *mimetic poiesis* “more philosophical and noble than history” is its engagement with “the possible,” “*ta dunata*” (Liddell, 1996) as an attempt to present “what could happen.” It is not sufficient to conceive *poiesis* as a relational and two-way creative process; it is not enough to suggest likenesses to be seen; *mimetic poiesis* needs to be effectively possible. Put differently, the type of learning that Aristotle refers to in Poetics is not only qualified by a peculiar way of relating with the work nor only by the philosophical suggestion of likenesses but also by manifestly affirming possibility as a necessary element of this learning's coming into being.

But how does an exercise in possibility look in everyday arts education practice? I think there are two suggestions that emerge from Poetics: the first explicitly regarding how to frame the possible; the second insinuating how to expand it.

### Framing the possible

This is no word game but the practice-based demand to set coordinates from where to exercise possibility in art. Along this line, Aristotle has only one piece of advice to offer: try to develop “probable impossibilities” (1460a 27) or what supposes concentrating on a single human action and distilling its salient elements. Once this is accomplished, the poet can highlight its potential implications, bearing always in mind that no matter how expansive this could turn out to be, it should remain within a single concrete work: meaning that the nature of the work need not lack variety but should possess a certain degree of

cohesiveness.<sup>38</sup> In other words, there is a call here for the poet to demonstrate the sufficient commitment to resist producing something too ambitious, as if attempting to make a map of the same size of the territory. There is no need to try to seize *all* possible possibilities; the effort should be placed instead on finding which are actually worth pursuing each time.

According to Aristotle, this is the perspective on possibility in which Homer outshines all other artists. Consider how in the Iliad he focuses on the very last moments of the war for Troy. One is even tempted to name these moments after Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses, whose probable impossibilities are still known to us: Brave Achilles' hubris-driven fight with Hector over Patroclus' death, his shield's description, and the fatal ankle wound; noble Hector's love and sacrifice for his father and homeland; Ulysses' perspicacious horse trap and temerarious offense to Neptune. Thousands of pages of drama masterfully centered on these basic actions! These are the fundamental possibilities that have allowed all posterior imaginations to ruminate on the name "Troy" with a sense of admiration that is as alive as ever.

Now, let us consider what this "probable impossibilities advice" means for a teacher who has to select and/or produce the artworks she wants to introduce to her students. It seems to me that regardless of her curriculum development strategy, we could all agree that she will seek for works that will help the class deepen their integral sense of what art is. It is as if she was looking for a prism that could help students see diverse possible perspectives, all coming from this concrete work. Put differently, she will look for what has more potential *vis-à-vis* her students; she will seek to find those works that may insinuate more probable impossibilities for them.

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<sup>38</sup> For example, in describing the demands of tragic writing, Aristotle indicates, "The perfection of style is to be clear without being meager" (1458a 18).

I think it is crucial here not to transform the notion of “probable impossibilities” into some reified criterion that will be easily assessable and later transformed into a new standard. Let us keep in mind that in Poetics the notion of possibility depends on *mimetic poiesis*. This is to say that seeking for probable impossibilities supposes, inevitably, the organic development of the process of making art and seeing new resemblances in it. I believe this allows for different layers of possibility for the teacher to pick: it may be the case that she chooses to emphasize the relationship with the work in the making; or with its past, present and future resemblances; she may also decide to emphasize the way in which she presents the work and—in line with our discussion of Stravinsky’s “respiration”—the interpretative methods that help making sense of it. Put differently, I think Aristotle’s greatest input here is trying to present *mimetic poiesis* as a true crystallization of possibility.

### Expanding the possible

However, what we just said could easily raise an objection: How can we guarantee that these specific individual works—or emphases on a work—will effectively expand our students’ horizons, allowing them to see more than what is visibly at hand? In other words, what will prevent our class from simply bogging down into this work regardless of its possible-like qualities? This is a real risk, no doubt. Aristotle seems to refer to it when narrating the common incident of a tragic writer who, having masterfully reached the climax of his work, fails to develop its consequences towards the end of the story.<sup>39</sup> However, the question here is not about producing a recipe to successfully spark possibility in art and education, but to suggest how the transition from framing the possible into expanding the possible may look like. An example will help illuminate the point:

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<sup>39</sup> “Some tie the knot well but unravel it ill” (1456a 9-10).

Tradition has it that when presenting his portrait of Gertrude Stein in 1906 (see below), Picasso was attacked by a group of critics who argued that the work did not look like her. He is said to have replied, “Never mind, it will!” This story, introduced by Elgin (2002), helps to highlight the educational potential that I find concealed within Aristotle’s sense of possibility by stressing how *mimetic poiesis* operates as a concretion of possibility and, at the same time, as a dynamic standard of that same possibility.



Let us approach these pictures as exercises in possible renditions of Fräulein Stein. Can you see the sharp nose and deep sight? The tense gesture? No? Yes? Wait! What Stein are you looking at!? What Picasso does is precisely to offer a new version of Stein where some details are emphasized and distorted while others are deleted or minimized. This seems to be what the public saw during the painting’s inauguration—the same thing that students could complain about—that this painting is a possible interpretation of Stein but not a portrayal of the way Stein was supposed to look.

I want to argue that art as an exercise in possibility sets on fire the expectation of what art ought to look like while suggesting a concrete alternative to ponder. In other words, it puts forward the possibility of what human beings can make through a peculiar

relationship with the work and the development of resemblances with it, that is, *mimetic poiesis*. It is not *just* that in producing the painting of Stein Picasso makes her image reach the status of probable impossibility, but that in doing so it allows for further wonderings around the image that will in turn originate other resemblances that will continue making sense of this work in new and different ways.

And in expanding this sense of possibility, the image also sets a standard for new possibility. Consider how, after looking at the painting, we gain a new vantage point from where to see Stein. Did she look more tired in the painting or in the photograph? Did she look older more than tired or more absorbed than old? It is not *just* that we gain a new standard for Stein, but through this painting, we are now able to relate to other works of art and other people who would not have looked like Stein without Picasso's creation (Elgin, 2002). In other words, if we have engaged in *poiesis* and we found some *mimetic* resemblances between the work and ourselves, then the work of art will not remain indifferent and we will carry it as a standard of future resemblances to unveil.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to present the pedagogical insights contained in Aristotle's Poetics. In the first place, I suggested the possibility of conceiving *poiesis* as the process of making an artwork. Here, I identified two salient qualities: that *poiesis* can be understood as a relational process that assimilates all elements while the process is being developed, and that this same process supposes a creative reciprocity that qualifies both maker and her work.

In the second place, I stressed the prominent attributes of *mimesis*. On the foreground, *mimesis* concerns for the development of semblances of human life. On



a deeper reading, *mimesis* grants the conditions for learning with art for it allows to recognize human-like semblances in the artwork, and to go on revealing new aspects of those same semblances.

In the third place, I suggested how the notion of *mimetic poiesis* is further qualified by Aristotle's idea of possibility. On the one hand, possibility demands for concretion in art, in the line of what Aristotle calls "probable impossibilities." On the other hand, possibility seems to constitute a peculiar standard from where to keep making and assessing new artworks that would allow for new resemblances to be unveiled.

## Chapter 5. Illuminating the work of students' and teachers' in art education

Thinking about a conclusion, I would like to revisit two school experiences that I consider exemplify some of the opportunities that may emerge from seeing art in the ways that we have discussed throughout the dissertation.

The first example will allow us to relate *poiesis* and a primordial sense of art, notions that we introduced in Chapters Four and Two respectively. We will consider how their distinct perspectives may help illuminate the everyday practice of teachers and students working with art. I will argue that the interaction between both notions help emphasize the relationship of teachers and students with the materials and processes of making art. Also, I will show how from this position teachers are able to recuperate a wisdom-based understanding of their disciplines that allow them to transform their scopes and possibilities.

The second example will relate respiration and *mimesis*, notions that we introduced in Chapters Three and Four respectively. We will proceed in the same manner as in the first example. I will argue that both notions help open up room where to develop new and meaningful interpretations of the artwork through the development of human-based resemblances of it.

We will provide special attention to the way both examples help recuperate the conclusions at which we arrived in each Chapter, and present them under the light of students' and teachers' everyday work.

### The sound of music

“It was a sunny Friday afternoon, first period after lunch. About thirty five students were gathered in the library practicing their lines and tuning (if not fixing) their musical instruments. Teachers, other students, the head of the school and a few parents looked on hoping that the performance would work. Unique about this concert was that the music as well as the African instruments themselves were created by the students. As the show began, a timid strings section alternated with dominating percussion variations, which in turn enlisted the winds in their rhythmic motifs. All, while the budding instrument makers mixed concentration, nervousness and pride in their attentive stares at their conductor and complicity smiles to their peers” (Boix-Mansilla, 2007).

The above quotation describes the premiere performance of “The sound of music,” an interdisciplinary research project in which I took part in 2007 as research assistant, and was aimed at developing connections between music and physics at the International School of Uganda in Kampala. In this arts-based experiment, eight grade students pursuing an International Baccalaureate Diploma were supposed to simultaneously learn music and physics through the construction of their own musical instrument, while the teachers of each course developed a set of collaborative activities to facilitate that learning.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to highlight that this project’s intention “went beyond using music to motivate student learning in physics” (p.1). It rather sought to show students how appreciating sound as music *and* as wave through the actual fabrication of a musical instrument can yield a thicker and more integrated comprehension of what it looks like to know and make anything from the point of view of music and physics. In the language that we have developed in Chapter Two, I would say that students began making their

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<sup>40</sup> It makes sense to clarify that, besides from having collaborated with this research and help drafting its conclusions; I worked in Kampala and personally participated in the following events.

instruments as they began knowing music and physics, and conversely, that they began knowing music and physics as they began making their instrument.

From the very outset, this project presented students and teachers with unique challenges. To begin with, students were supposed to learn the physical qualities of sound considered as a wave that propagates through a material medium. In order to do this, they had to go through a series of experiments that included understanding how a ship's sonar work both under the water and in open air, and how the speed of sound varies according to the medium it is running through (p. 15).

In addition, to discover the musical qualities of sound each of them had to build a musical instrument using natural and native materials, and learn how to play it in an ensemble. For this purpose, a diverse group of folklore musicians visited the school and shared with the students their impressions about the tasks of building and learning how to play their own musical instrument. It will be significant for us to stress that this was the very first time in their lives that these pupils encountered a formal venue where they were asked to learn music and physics, both considered as isolated disciplines or working in collaboration (p. 8).

As regards the teacher themselves –who had shown interest on the project from the beginning and proved as valuable collaborators all the way through– we asked them to develop this curriculum not only in formal collaboration but also to spare the necessary time to be present at their colleague's classes, ready to jump in whenever the conversation expanded from one field into the other. It will be relevant for us to indicate that neither of them was an aficionado to the practice of her colleague's area –The physics teacher *just* enjoyed listening to music, and in the eyes of the music teacher physics had never been

something “too alive”–. Also, both instructors were people with years of experience in their fields and an outstanding record of teaching excellence at the International School of Uganda (p. 8, 15).

Now, what does it mean to begin to know music and physics while building your own musical instrument? One way of approaching this question comes to mind:

In the first place, I remember a student that decided to make a drum (p. 7). In Uganda a drum is serious business, the ‘national instrument.’ Drums are used to celebrate each of the stages of life –there are different types of drums in births, graduations, marriages, and funerals–. In fact, in Uganda everyone seems to know how to make a drum. For example, out of my observation, these are the mandatory steps to make a drum in Uganda: First, go and pick a tree, cut it. Choose an area of its trunk, cut it and empty it leaving only a wood cylinder. Then, cover the extremes of the cylinder with two cow skin lids and tense these lids using stripes made of the same cow skin. Granted, now you have something to hit with your hand and make sound, what I thought would satisfy the notion of drum.

However, the traditional emphasis is that the drum maker needs to be able to model and recognize its peculiar sound or else it will not become *her* drum. In the words of a traditional drum maker that visited the school during the project “each drum has a heart,” a peculiar sound quality that comes forth through the interaction between wood, cow skin and artist.

### Poiesis

I believe that this demand to appropriate the drum helps manifest how what we said in Chapter Four regarding *poiesis* can be meaningful for art education:

On the one hand, learning how to make a drum supposes coming to realize that each of the elements that intervene in this process are related in a common unity that is indivisible in practice. The soil that engendered the tree, the tree itself, its wood, the cow skin that covers the drum, the technical ability employed in composing these together, all these elements are an extension of, or a continuation of the hand of the young woman who is learning how to make a drum. Put differently, *poiesis* is a relational process that sustains all its inherent elements while transforming them all in the process itself. In the making of the drum all of its necessary elements become the making of the drum.

On the other hand, making a drum supposes learning how the relationship between maker and instrument is in fact mutually creative. In this particular example, the student is dedicated to finding and choosing the qualities of her own sound, that is, of *her* drum's *heart*. As her hand learns how to sculpt the wood and she begins to tell the different sounds that resound within it, she progressively becomes the drum maker; as the empty trunk begins to take the shape of a Ugandan drum it starts to reveal its proper sound and becomes a personal drum. Put differently, *poiesis* is a creative expansion of the human interaction with the world. In the making of the drum, maker and instrument become a mirroring echo of each other.

Thus, we could argue that in the everyday practice of art education *poiesis* supposes an urgent need, a demand to be with the work from its preliminary material genesis, alongside its development, until the moment that it eventually leaves its makers' hand. This is to say that *poiesis* requires from both teachers and students the capacity to respond *with* – rather than *to* – the work, to be ready to inquiry about this very process of making that engulfs them both, and feel personally addressed by it. I will get back to this point.

Let us further develop this example. Consider how the *poiesis* process that the drum maker is carrying on helps illuminate and challenge some of the teachers' assumptions of what it is that knowing and making a drum looks like within their disciplines:

The fact was that one afternoon, as the ensemble of eight grade musicians was rehearsing with their instruments, the school speakers announced that there was an unusually strong storm on its way and that classes were suspended to allow everyone a safe trip home.

When the school reopened its doors the next morning after the tempest, our young drum maker realized with disgust that something had happened to her drum. "Someone did something to my drum!" she said infuriated to both the music and physics teacher. After looking at the drum –that seemed perfectly all right– the teachers asked "How so? What is wrong with it?" "Well, it sounds different this morning, thicker and deeper; yesterday the sound was lighter!" (p. 7). That was an excellent opportunity for both teachers to demonstrate their expertise.

The music teacher explained that all instruments respond to changes in air temperature and humidity. That is why professional musicians take time to tune their instruments not only before the actual performance but also during its different movements. Likewise, the physics teacher emphasized how temperature variations affect the speed at which particles vibrate, and how water vapor actually affects the thickness or density of materials by attaching more or less particles to those bodies. The shared conclusion was "The storm changed the drum's sound."

Faced with this type of information, our drum maker replied "I just want to know *how* to make my drum sound as it used to, I don't care *why* it's making this noise." Having

said this, she went to the back of the room and started experimenting with the strings that stretched the cow skin lids checking whether that would help recuperate the drum's former sound (p. 13).

Later that day I met with both teachers and tried to wonder about the implications behind what that student was looking for and what they had managed to do –or failed to do– through that dialogue about the drum. What became particularly interesting for us was that the change in the sound quality proved to be a real disruptive factor for the type of assumptions each of them had about their disciplines' scope. Individually, each teacher was very sure that she had provided the student with an adequate explanation and had shown the reasons behind the sound change. However, when confronted with her colleague's side of the explanation both teachers acknowledged that they were forced to considering what else was in music beyond pitches and rhythms, and what else was in sound beyond bouncing waves. The fact that the drum's sound had changed had made them revisit their own ways of approaching both music and physics:

For instance, the music teacher explained how intriguing she found the question of how exactly her instruments produced sound. It was evident for her that she had the necessary knowledge and technical ability to play different instruments with adequate mastery. And yet, her involvement with this experiment of making an instrument from scratch and learning how to play it proved to be a real trigger for an enlarged sense of musical inquiry. She finally argued “physics, once a distant discipline became suddenly a very interesting one” (p.7).

Likewise, the physics teacher acknowledged “the limits of [her] capacity to explain why a particular instrument was not making the expected sound” (p.8). She commented that



she knew, for example, how to use a sonogram to show the physical impact that vibrations produce when bouncing or running through different materials. And yet, her involvement with the drum maker's anxiety to try to recuperate her instrument's original sound opened a window into considering what else is there in sound beyond particles vibrating across materials.

As a conclusion to their reflection they both agreed that “*with the instruments the students created, [we] were able to bring the elements of science and music into life*” (p.11).<sup>41</sup> This claim still resounds with me. It makes me question if this is not actually another confirmation of how the notion of *poiesis* may impact art education by challenging teachers to make art and wonder about art next to their students.

Let us recapitulate how the teachers' task looked like in the beginning of this project: they were asked to develop the curriculum and all activities in collaboration, they had to be present at the other's class, and they had to watch over the instruments' fabrication and performance processes. Doing these things already provided them with an enhanced view on their own fields. For example, the music teachers affirmed “with the construction of these simple traditional African instruments students realized what happens when sound is produced, they can *see* and *touch*” (p.6). Likewise, the physics teachers claimed “the actual making of the instrument gave a wider scope to their creativity and provided a platform for individual and authentic work and deeper understanding of the concepts in physics” (p. 6). However interesting, what both teachers were talking about at that time was that students had “realized what happens,” students found a “wider scope to their creativity,” students got a “deeper understanding.” Students. And teachers?!

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<sup>41</sup> My emphasis.

It was not until both teachers felt personally addressed by the challenge of that drum that had changed its sound that they were actually capable to assume the making of those instruments as something that resounded with and within them. Put differently, as teachers did not have the demand to make their own instrument I think they delayed –and could have completely missed out– an enriched inquiry about the relational and mutually creative qualities that emerge when viewing art through the lens of *poiesis*.

Would I suggest, based on *poiesis* that teachers need to involve themselves in the making of the same artworks that they ask students to make? I do. Now, by proposing this someone could rightly question whether this implies that students and teachers are actually doing the same, that is, going through the same processes or engaging in the same activities that will produce the same works. I believe that our discussion of a primordial sense of art in Chapter Two will help avoid such conundrum.

### A primordial sense of art

Let us recapitulate the example we provided in Chapter Two regarding the prehistoric artists that painted the walls of Lascaux –the ones Picasso judged as having “invented everything” (Thurman, 2008)–. These are the people that seemingly out of nowhere were able to produce some of the earliest signs of human civilization: prehistoric paintings of the lives of people, animals and plants. Unique about these paintings is the fact that their makers lacked any previous artistic knowledge except for the actual exercise of engaging with the materials they found around them, and wondering about their cave.

Now, let us image our eight graders entering a similar cave-like situation where the only indication is to make a musical instrument. It is a similar situation in the sense that they have no memories of learning “music” and/or “physics” nor they know the rules or ways of using their specific methods. They are in the “dark.” The few things they find at hand are pieces of wood and cows skin; hammers and nails; sounds from the Ugandan jungle and sounds from their working desks.

From the point of view of an observer outside their cave, what children start doing looks like playful naïveté. They are not afraid of making mistakes for there is no criterion to tell right from wrong except for the sounds that they are beginning to explore and learning to play with their instruments. They feel no demand to demonstrate that they know what an eight grader should know about music and physics for all they know throughout this experiment is linked to making those instruments. They find hard to understand questions about the use or benefit of this activity because for them this activity means making something of their own that will manifest their personal imprint in the world. The purpose of such an activity is obvious for them.

So they gather around these new makings and experiment with their sounds.

Sometimes there are irruptions of sparks that illuminate some while removing others into deeper shadows, for example, when students were informed at the beginning of the project that “the piano’s central pitch A could be translated as 440 hertz” (p. 13). At times there are outbursts of insight like, for example, when a student commented that the human voice was able to make different sounds including traditional musical instruments’ as she sung in tune with her native harp (p.11).

By the end of the project all students perform together with their instruments before an audience of parents and fellow schoolmates. Between the different sections of the performance some students take time to explain how it was that they came to build their instruments. Fascinating about this scene is that, as students comment and reflect on their experience, they show the areas of the drum where “deeper” sounds come from; they demonstrate how the “vibration” of one chord affects another one; they make a point on the relationship between “sound” and “silence.”

I believe this example helps manifest how meaningful a primordial sense of art can be for students. By this I mean that students’ knowledge of how the physical characteristics of the sound wave relate to the development and interpretation of music was –and, one could hope will be–inevitably linked to the fabrication of those drums and other African instruments. Put differently, for those students, the technical skills and disciplinary knowledge of music and physics are intertwined with the process of making and playing their own musical instruments. In comparison to the teachers’ conclusion we mentioned

above<sup>42</sup>, I would say in the students' eyes, the elements of music and physics were *always* alive in the making and playing of their instruments.

Still, this does not answer whether what students were going through was the same or similar to what their teachers were experimenting. It seems to me that teachers had to walk another path in comparison to students', somewhat resembling a two-way movement of re-examination and transformation.

To begin with, the sound-changing drum had forced them to take a step towards a primordial consideration of art as we commented above. This is to say that they had to learn to re-examine their own presuppositions about the actual scope and possibilities of their fields in view of the fact that there was a richer and more challenging reality to perceive beyond their original standpoints. There was more music beyond technical knowledge and performance; there was more physics beyond sonogram explanations about particles' trajectories. Put differently, teachers had to unwind the seemingly one-way path of methodological conditions and arguments to engage in the heuristically naked making of an artwork.

This movement certainly implied an effort, as if they were covering their eyes away from distinctions into the vision of an original unity. By now I believe we have produced the necessary language to suggest that those teachers were able to un-walk their partial perspectives and appreciate an original common ground where making and knowing shake hands. The effort of carrying this movement on lies precisely on the fact that they needed to re-examine what was altogether too familiar, too close, and so obvious that it had become invisible. For highly trained people like teachers –deeply involved in their disciplines'

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<sup>42</sup> "With the instruments the students created, [we] were able to bring the elements of science and music into life" (p.11).

ways— recuperating a primordial sense of art can be blinding like opening our eyes before the Sun with the intention to see ourselves. This is why in the example above teachers needed to meet the making of that drum as a way of recuperating their own handy knowledge of reality.

However, this movement was not one that ended in mere concealment but allowed for a transformation. The point of arriving at a primordial perspective is not to reject or destroy the worth of disciplinary lenses. Instead, it is to carry on from their very basis a more acute awareness of the common reality that their individual views try to capture. Although this is not the place to analyze the degree of reality of ‘inter or trans disciplinary’ knowledge, I do believe that a primordial take on art could help us imagine what else is there to be seen beyond stagnant limits that *only* emphasize, for example, that what you know in music is different from what you know in physics. Consider, for example, the following question that one of the teachers was able to formulate and ask students as they got closer to the end of “The sound of music” project:

What does it mean for you to try to convey different musical qualities through your instrument now that you are beginning to understand the physical implications of sound in music? (p.13)

This is not just a music and physic based question. This is an interpretative question whose formulation is not a disciplinary problem and whose answer is not a definitive solution. It is rather an invitation to go on wondering about what those instruments are able to produce. Certainly, it is a request to continue engaging with and within music and physics but also, it seems to anticipate the richness of stepping into new common grounds.

### Making your own One

We will now move on into considering our second example. I will present it as a way to illustrate and explore the theme of respiration and *mimesis*, that we introduced in Chapter Three and Four respectively, within the context of a lived artistic experience. We will pay special attention to the way these notions help open up room where to develop new interpretations of the work, and how these interpretations suppose the development of human-based resemblances with the work.

In 2005 I taught a course on Contemporary Culture and Art to a class of twenty high school students in Buenos Aires' suburbs. At that time, in the same school a colleague of mine was instructing an Art History course. By the end of the year her course had reached to Jackson Pollock while mine was developing a final comparison between Ancient and Modern-day art education.

One morning during break-time I was getting ready for my class when the Art History teacher entered the staff room visibly upset. I asked her what had happened. After a tense pause she slowly unfolded a large image of Pollock's One (see below) saying "They're so wrong! They think Pollock is just rubbish!" The fact was my colleague had introduced Pollock's One to the class, inviting the students to inquiry on the material conditions of the work, and invest some time wondering around it. According to her, the attempt had been a blunt failure filled by students' mockery and laughter. To make things worse, she felt particularly hurt by a student who had reacted to the painting saying "Anyone can do this!"



After such a description of her classroom experience we simply spent some time in silence, staring at One. Honestly, when one engages with this painting for the first time it is easy to understand the position from where some of my colleague's students were criticizing it. At first hand, what you see is a chaotic combination of lines, colors, drops of paint, and different depths and textures, all assembled on a huge canvas (8' 10'' x 17' 6' in the original). This perception is reinforced if you go through the experience of listening to MoMA's visual description of the work (MoMA, 2012). Even if you close your eyes, you will be imagining how One is an "abstract work without any hint of representation." Black, blue, grey, brown and white paint, poured or dripped on the canvas forming straight lines, arches and waves that randomly overlay in traces of varying thickness: A web of infinite trails running across the limits of a frameless painting.

However, on a second or third meeting with the work –as I was going through at that time– one may begin to unveil different viewpoints from where to approach it. It could be the case that the painting still looks very much chaotic but chaos is a relative notion – like obscurity– that depends on lacking the necessary coordinates or criteria to make sense of something. What if One spoke about an order whose light I am not able to perceive at the



moment and in judging it chaotic I lose the opportunity to eventually see some meaningful quality of that hypothetical order?

Also, it could be the case that one decides to challenge the claim that this painting has “no hint of representation.” If we literally understand representation as “an artistic likeness” (Agnes, 2002), there is nothing that prevents us from arguing that, for example, One is indeed a representation of the alternative kind of order we mentioned above or of the idea of transformation. I will get back to this point when restating *mimesis*.

Finally, it could be the case that no matter how many times we meet this work, we could not help but seeing it as one big mistake, an error on canvas that offends the very notion of art, and that only deserves room in a decent galleria if presented as an example of what artists should never try to do unless they feel inclined to lose their job and pursue public humiliation. In this case, it would be fascinating to listen to the arguments that judge One as an invalid art form.

After discussing similar interpretations with my colleague it became evident that there was much more to this painting than what an unfortunate first encounter could yield. And then it came to us: What if we took the claim that this type of painting is something anyone could do really seriously? In other words, more than trying to prove a student right or wrong, what if we asked all students to actually make their own One, using Pollock’s same materials and techniques? At that moment we could not anticipate if the experiment would work but we did agree that its purpose was not to try to technically reproduce Pollock but rather to get a sense of his approach to the canvas that would in turn allow students to glimpse their own way of knowing and making art.

### The experiment

And so we decided to work together and join our two courses in this end-of-the-year project. In view of the scarce amount of time we had available before the end of classes we paired up our classroom time and were able to secure two full hours on Wednesday's afternoon. Thus, for four consecutive Wednesdays we devoted ourselves to "making your own One." In the school gym –that was typically used as a mini-soccer stadium– we provided each student with a canvas of a smaller size (4ft x 8ft) than Pollock's but respecting his canvas' proportion.<sup>43</sup> We also got different types of enamel and oil paints like those we can see in the painting, brushes and the necessary cleaning tools. Then we asked our students to place their canvases wherever they wanted on the gym's floor and hanged a real size reproduction of One on the wall, making sure everyone could see it under adequate lighting.

It is significant to stress that our sole indication during the project's four weeks was that we were "making your own One." We did think about watching all together Ed. Harris' movie about Pollock's life but time and chance decided otherwise. There was no complementary art or Abstract Expressionist scholarship involved either. Also, no one in the school except for the students and the two teachers was allowed to see the project until the premiere night.

### Respiration

How did this project actually look like in the making? In a retrospective analysis I think its development echoes the conclusions we arrived at in Chapter Three when discussing some of the characteristics behind the notion of respiration.

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<sup>43</sup> It was not possible to find or purchase forty canvases of Pollock's original size.

Let us consider how this type of exercise supposes an opening up of room to be with the artwork. On a first level, this sense of space was stimulated by the fact that students were allowed to bridge the traditional distance between work, materials and themselves in a new way. On the first place, they were not only able to walk around the canvas but also to jump –and run through– into it. It was quite a view to see how students managed to discover some of Pollock’s own painting strategies and create new ones. The fact of placing such a large canvas on the floor without a wood frame or stand demanded a non conventional approach to it. Thus, some students brought scaffolds to reach where their arms could not, some others wrapped specific areas of the canvas unfolding others, a few even cut the canvas into more manageable pieces and later re-assembled their painting *a piacere*.

On the second place, they were not only able to paint the canvas but to let the paint rain the canvas, erupt the canvas, and blow the canvas. It was exciting to see how students dared to explore alternative ways of making the paint reach their blank target. Some brought a fan blower to spread the paint like a color storm, others filled balloons with paint and later launched their bombs over their plain terrain, a few of them poured paint on one of the edges of the canvas and waved the paint towards its center by flapping its corners.

On a deeper level, opening up room to be with the artwork meant that “making your own One” invited students to move beyond the trajectory that concludes the work of art in an explanation. Evidently, all art education activity implies some type of focus or lens –like the ones we provided, indeed, when we picked Pollock and gave our students those particular materials; and when we titled the whole activity “making your own One”–. Still, the intention of such an activity was to grant students with the sufficient space and freedom

to stretch themselves out in the process of making the work. Put differently, we tried to frame the experiment as frameless as possible to try to avoid the risk of turning the work's explanation into its main purpose; and those hypothetical collections of explanations into the objective of the entire class work.

In other words, this experiment wanted to prevent an excess in the contextualization of art. If we understand context as “the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning” (Agnes, 2002), this activity wanted to emphasize that the very process of making art is competent enough to illuminate what the work is about. This is not to purposefully distort or obscure its meaning but to acknowledge that without those elements that go together with the text –such is the literal meaning of the Latin prefix *con* in *con-textus* (Lewis, 2002)– we are surely left with a more naked setting from where to understand our work, but also with more room where to expand its meaning.

Not to appear over exaggerated, I want to make clear that I believe there are brilliant explanations of One<sup>44</sup> that can inform interesting interpretations of Pollock's work individually and as a trend within contemporary art. For example, Ernst Gombrich (1998) affirms:

The tangling of [One's] lines satisfies two contrasting demands of twentieth century art: first, the yearning for the simplicity and spontaneity of childhood that evokes the memories of blurbs of a developmental age anterior even to the formation of images; and on the opposed extreme, the sophisticated interest for the problems of pure painting (p.602).

It seems to me that in the case of our students, who were being introduced to Pollock for the first time ever, Gombrich's remarks would have been too bright. I say this in the sense that from our students' point of view, who had those white canvases before

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<sup>44</sup> As there were excellent explanations of John Cage's 4'33' in Chapter Three.

them, considering such scholarly deep claims could have constrained their drive to experiment *allá* Pollock more than helped release that same drive.

This is meaningful about respiration with reference to the decisions teachers need to take in art education. It is not just that in emphasizing the “breath” of an artwork we are able to go beyond the dichotomy between the “the yearning for simplicity and spontaneity” and “the sophisticated interest” for pure painting. In emphasizing the “breath” of art we are able to assume both extremes and dwell in their in-betweeness. It is in this “breath” that we will be able to develop interpretations that come together after relating and sustaining both the similar and the contrary, the illogical and the commonsensical. From the viewpoint of respiration, the work of art operates as a *fact* of these extremes coming together.

However, by now someone could raise a real objection arguing that teachers will feel afraid –or think it is irresponsible– to suggest such a frameless experiment because it will inevitably render contradictory and paradoxical interpretations about the purpose of the experiment as a whole, and about the students’ work as the living elements of that whole.

It seems to me that the peculiar gift that respiration has to offer to art education does involve a collection of colliding interpretations coming together. But this is not to say “anything goes.” Instead it is to grant the conditions that would allow for “everything can become from of this.” It is an expansive movement rather than a careless one. Put differently, respiration does not mean to enthrone the senseless, the speechless or the unfathomable but to allow for its interaction with our students’ and our own work.

The question still remains as regards how to hold this “breath,” how to make sense of the type of meanings that may emerge from respiration. I think that the idea of *mimesis* is helpful here for it reminds us that we are not urging our students to explain their work as

facts of art history. Instead, we are collaborating in the story of their own artworks, the One that they are trying to make possible.

### Mimesis

Let us imagine the opening night of this school-wide exhibit of student work. People enter the school and walk towards the gym. When they get to the gate they can already begin to see how the ceiling lights are on, showing forty students standing next to some sort of carpets. As they walk into the room they realize that those carpets are actually paintings –if you can call those collections of scattered lines and paint drops, paintings–, and that there is a large exemplar of these peculiar art forms hanging on one of the walls as if it was a real piece of art being exhibited in a museum. On top of this picture, everyone can read a banner saying “Making your own One.”

And so the administrators begin to walk around the student work, and parents feel moved to question their children about what is it that they have done. Also, some of my fellow teachers ask for the educational purpose of this activity where students have invested four Wednesday’s afternoon –I will not over-romanticize people’s comments although time may have helped me not to remember the less friendly remarks my colleague and I received that night–

What I do recall is that the biggest surprise was caused by the variety of renditions of the “making your own One” guideline. The truth is that a large number of students had decided to make paintings that offered similar versions to Pollock’s. These were individually distinct and yet it was rather easy to tell the connection to Pollock’s theme. However, various students understood the guideline less literally and presented self-portraits as if reading something like “making yourself,” some others made a collage of

numbers “1,” and a few created a comic-like narration of rock band U2’s song ONE. As the Principal put it with a hard-to-decipher-tone “They are all alternatives to the banner hanging on the wall!” Kindly understood I think that was precisely the case and a way of seeing how *mimesis* can impact art education.

Let us restate what we said in Chapter Four: Aristotle conceives *mimesis* as the instinct from which *poiesis* comes forth. This, in the sense that before engaging with the material conditions and techniques that will help develop the work, the artist seems to have a natural sense that her work will focus on human life as its broad theme. In addition, Aristotle seems to argue that *mimesis*’ theme will manifest through the development of likenesses between artist and work.

Thus, the notion of *mimesis* is crucial to help us understand that what students were trying to do in the Pollock experiment was not to reproduce a copy or to imitate Pollock’s work; instead, they were looking for their own personal approach to the canvas. It is significant here to restate what we said about the relationship between *mimesis* and imitation: Those realities that we can judge as imitated objects “cannot exist prior to the occurrence of mimesis” (Tsuji, 2010). While imitation aims at reproducing a likeness, *mimesis* focuses on opening up connections between human life and the work of art, and it is precisely out of these connections that likenesses will eventually emerge later on.

As Walter Benjamin helped us see in Chapter Four, the gift that *mimesis* has to offer art is precisely granting the conditions that will allow developing likenesses between the work and those engaged with it (Benjamin, 1996). It is in this sense that *mimesis* is not only chronologically anterior to imitation but a philosophical precondition for the making of all artworks. Put differently, in considering the Pollock experiment students were asked to

imitate nothing but to attempt to create connections between their canvas, the experiment, and themselves. They were invited to produce human relatable works that connected One with the motto “making your own One.”

And let us face the same type of objection we raised in Chapter Four: Even if we accept that *mimesis*’ theme is human life, and that it depends on granting the conditions that will allow developing resemblances between the artist and her work, where can we see that One or that our students’ works were portraying human life?! After all, the label “abstract expressionism” is very much attached to Pollock’s work and it seems to refer to an art form that was ejected outside of the world of humanity, and is now completely disengaged from it.

Imagine we accept this critique and place ourselves before the messy, figureless blurb of One. Once again, what is human in there? I would say two distinct qualities: First, the print of a human artist’s hand. It is the work of someone who decided to venture her vital energies into the material continuation of her own self. This means that from the viewpoint of *mimesis*, artworks are human centered and connected because they are being made by human beings. By ‘being made by human beings’ I mean that the maker’s handprint is virtually present in the work even when it touches it no more.

Second, regardless if we see in the work something that looks explicitly human, *mimesis*’ theme seems to point towards a qualitative disposition more than towards an objective comparison between particular works and a human map key. In other words, *mimesis* seems to call us to partake in bringing forth some type of meaning with the work, assuming that meaning *as* an echo of our own life. And this supposes, certainly, that



artworks need to provide for some type of relatable venue that could be assumed *as* human life.

From this point of view, the question regarding *what* is human in One is no longer valid. We could replace it instead for *how* could we assume One as human life? And it is precisely in beginning to answer this question that we will see likenesses emerge before us.

Let us take the example of those students that offered similar renditions to Pollock's One. Imagine a parent entering that gym and walking between those canvases: Oh my! What are children doing in this school?! Complex, dense blurbs! Yet, in confronting and comparing a group of them she finds that each has something like a style, a strategic approach to the canvas. Some prefer twisted lines, some chromatic explosions, some raindrops, some all these together. The subject matter of these paintings can be actually decomposed in formal structures. How interesting!

As she continues walking, her assessment of the work gives way to a wondering inquiry. Suddenly, she is no longer walking about, comparing students work, but journeying among them. She begins to see a more nuanced quality of complexity here. Let us say it has a name, a personal name, it is someone in her life story; someone whose presence in her life originally resembled a single thread of color. But in time became too convoluted, obscuring that former simple manner. Yet this new complexity still holds a peculiar integrity that gives room to further develop their relationship. There is still hope.

Is this resemblance of life's journeying real? Objective? Does it exist beyond that parent and those works? Restating what we said in Chapter Four, what is significant from the standpoint of *mimesis* is that these likenesses are possible.

By ‘possible’ I mean here that the artwork is not a fixed account of the past. It is not ‘something’ that ‘someone’ began and finished in a remote era and is now the object of a fossils’ catalogue. From the point of view of *mimesis*, the artwork sustains the relationship between likenesses and allow for their ongoing development. Put differently, the likenesses that come forth in engaging with the work do not have to stop growing, ever. In revisiting the work, likenesses may re-emerge or be further transformed as I myself change throughout my life. From the viewpoint of *mimesis*, the artwork is an opening of possibilities.

That likenesses are possible also means that at the same time that students developed those possible ways of “making your own One” they created a standard of how art –particularly painting in this case– can look like. We knew before starting the experiment that students had judged Pollock’s art as “rubbish” and One as something “anyone could do.” I cannot affirm that today they would argue something different but I believe that after going through those four weeks of experimentation they now possess their own rendition of what a white canvas can look like. This is a criterion that they lacked before the activity and now have at hand. It is a new lens, dynamic as their lives move on and they meet new art forms that complement their assessment of Pollock’s and their own canvases. It is a standard of possibility they were able to create for themselves.

### Conclusion

In this concluding chapter we revisited the notions of *poiesis*, primordial sense of art, respiration and *mimesis* within the context of two lived art in education experiences. It is my hope that each of these ideas and their peculiar interactions became a lens to help us reveal different ways of approaching art in education.

In the first example, The sound of music, we focused on *poiesis* and a primordial sense of art. As regards *poiesis* we showed how this notion help us see the making of an artwork as: a relational process that sustains all its inherent elements while transforming them all in the process itself –in the making of that drum all of its necessary elements became the making of the drum–, and a creative expansion of the human interaction with the world –in the making of the drum, maker and instrument became a mirroring echo of each other.– In addition, we saw how *poiesis* requires from both teachers and students the capacity to respond *with* –rather than *to*– the work. This means to be ready to inquiry about this very process of making that engulfs them both, and feel personally addressed by it.

Moving on, in order to characterize how *poiesis* challenged students and teachers in a different way, we switched lenses to a primordial sense of art. From the students' viewpoint we emphasized how the elements of music and physics were *always* alive in the making and playing of their instruments. This is to say that for them, the knowledge of how the physical characteristics of the sound wave relate to the development and interpretation of music is inevitably linked to the fabrication of those drums and other African instruments.

From the teachers' point of view, we showed how they had to go through a double movement. On the one hand, the sound-changing drum had forced them to re-examine their own presuppositions about actual the scope of their fields in view of the fact that there was a richer and more challenging reality to perceive beyond their original standpoints –there was more music beyond technical knowledge and performance; there was more physics beyond sonogram explanations about particles' trajectories–. Teachers had to unwind the

seemingly one-way path of methodological conditions and arguments to engage in the heuristically naked making of an artwork.

On the other hand, recuperating such a handy knowledge of reality allowed for a transformation. This is to say that they were able to carry on from the very basis of their disciplines a more acute awareness of the common ground that their individual views try to capture. The purpose of this transformation was not to reject or destroy the worth of disciplinary lenses but to anticipate the richness of stepping into new common arenas.

In the second example, Making your our One, we focused on respiration and *mimesis*. As regards respiration we saw how this idea helps us bridge the distance between work, materials and artists in two ways. First, by allowing both teachers and students to experiment with non conventional ways of materializing their work. Second, by opening up room to be with the artwork beyond trying to explain it. This was not aimed at distorting its meaning but appreciating how less contextual environments may provide more naked or deprived grounds from where to understand our work, this is, more room where to expand its meaning.

We emphasized how from the viewpoint of respiration teachers can help students perceive the “breath” between extreme perspectives on art education, and search for their work’s proper meaning within that in-betweeness. We argued that it is this “breath” that allows developing interpretations that come together after relating and sustaining those extreme perspectives. From the viewpoint of respiration, the work of art operates as a *fact* of these extremes coming together.

In order to deepen our sight of how meaning may emerge from a perspective like respiration we switched lenses to *mimesis*. This idea allows us to see the artwork as

focusing on human life as its broad theme and manifesting this theme through the development of likenesses between the artist and work. As regards conceiving the work as human-based we emphasized how art is always human in the sense that its processes and products are developed by human beings. And, even if we do not find anything that looks explicitly human in the work, *mimesis* incarnates a qualitative disposition, a call to partake in bringing forth some type of meaning with the work, assuming that meaning *as* an echo of our own life.

This disposition to assume the work as an echo of our own life is what grants the opportunity to go on engaging with it, always open to seeing new possible resemblances as they emerge. In this sense, the work will create new possibilities as we revisit it, and will become a standard to perceive humanity as a whole under a new light, the light provided by the very artwork that we created.

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